# THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

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## 8 DEAD, 31 MISSING IN U'KHAND AVALANCHE; RESCUE OPS ON

**Disaster struck Border Roads Organisation's Sumna-Rimkhim road site in Chamoli near India-China border on Friday night**

**384 RESCUED AFTER GLACIER COLLAPSES**

The avalanche occurred after a part of a glacier collapsed, trapping around 430 road construction workers. Search operations were mounted by the Indian Army and ITBP, resulting in the rescue of 384 people. Seven injured persons were flown to the Army hospital in Joshimath in helicopters. Both the Army and the ITBP's forward camps in the area were unaffected | **P8**

**SECOND MAJOR DISASTER SINCE FEBRUARY**

- The site is located near the confluence of the Girthigad and the Kiogad, two streams that originate from the Dhauli Ganga river, which witnessed a calamitous avalanche in February, killing 80
- The road is crucial to gain access to locations like the disputed Barahoti area, where Chinese transgressions have been reported

**18 inches**

ICE LOST PER YEAR IN GLACIERS SINCE 2000 DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE


CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI


### ANNOUNCEMENT

*Dear reader,*

India is going through its worst phase of the Covid pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of people are struggling, many in vain, to exercise their right to live, as a ramshackle universal healthcare system proves that it has no answers to the challenges posed by a creepy bug. The health ministry's daily bulletin of fresh positive cases and fatalities has hit the stratosphere, so have SOS messages from individuals and hospitals seeking oxygen refill and lifesaving medicines. Hospitals refuse fresh admissions for want of Covid beds. The rush at crematoriums is heart-breaking. Most of us already have friends or relatives who have succumbed to Covid-19 or are battling for life. In such a tragic time, we find it incongruous that the festival of cricket is on in India, with layers of bio bubbles creating protection. This is commercialism gone crass. The problem is not with the game but its timing. Cricket, too, must accept that we are passing through an unprecedented crisis. In the circumstances, The New Indian Express has decided to suspend IPL coverage in the newspaper with immediate effect till a semblance of normalcy is restored. This is a small gesture towards keeping the nation's attention focused on life and death issues. We are sure that our readers will see the point. These are times when we must stand as one nation with one resolve.

– Editor

Delhi HC asks Centre when 480 MT of oxygen per day allocated for Delhi would see light of the day, raps Delhi govt for being inefficient; says people who could be saved are also dying

# HC fumes as govts pass the oxygen buck

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

THE Delhi High Court on Saturday pulled up both the Centre and the Delhi government for passing the buck in the midst of a pandemic and directed them to ensure smooth supply of oxygen to various hospitals in the national capital.

During an urgent hearing on Saturday, a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli warned it will hang any person who tries to obstruct oxygen supplies to hospitals here.

The court said those who have low immunity may eventually die but the problem comes when people who could be saved are also dying. "We are calling it a wave, it is actually a tsunami," the court said.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, said there might be a rapid rise in the number of cases in May and June and the country needs to be ready for the worst.

He explained how the government is working round the clock to import oxygen and exploring the remotest possibility of generating oxygen from wherever it is possible.

The court was hearing submissions by the counsel for Maharaja Agrasen Hospital, Jaipur Golden Hospital, Batra Hospital and Saroj Super Speciality Hospital here over shortage of oxygen for treating seriously-ill Covid patients.

"States are arranging from tankers to everything. We are just assisting them. But in Delhi, everything is put on us," the Centre said.

"Let's try and not be a cry baby," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said in response to Delhi government lawyer's complaint that the Centre was not complying with the guidelines for oxygen allocation.

It also asked the Centre when the 480 MT of oxygen per day allocated for Delhi would see the light of the day.

"You had assured us that 480 MT per day will reach Delhi. Tell us when will it come?" the court questioned the Centre after the Delhi government said it was getting only 380 MT oxygen per day over the past few days and it received only around 300 MT on Friday.

The court also questioned Delhi government officials as to what endeavour they have made to secure tankers to get the supply of oxygen allocated to it by the Centre.

The court observed that while the tankers had reached the plant in Durgapur and were ready to be transported through railway for Rourkela and Kalinga Nagar, the Delhi government did not arrange tanker.

"We know how people react (when they lose their loved ones). Let's not have a law and order situation," the HC said.

The matter would be heard next on April 26. **P7**

Covid patients getting free oxygen, arranged by a Sikh organisation at Indirapuram Gurdwara, in Ghaziabad on Saturday | PTI

**TWEETS CRITICAL OF GOVT TAKEN DOWN**

Twitter took down dozens of tweets in India, some of which were critical of the Centre's handling of the pandemic, to comply with an emergency order from the government. The order had directed it to censor over 50 tweets, including some from prominent users

**NATIONWIDE**

| | APRIL 23 | APRIL 24 |
|---|---|---|
| Fresh cases | 3,32,730 | 3,46,786 |
| Recoveries | 1,93,279 | 2,19,838 |
| Deaths | 2,263 | 2,624 |

# Major hospitals hang on to every ounce of $O_2$

BOSKY KHANNA & PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA @ Bengaluru

WITH Karnataka touching newer highs every day as the Covid-19 situation spins out of control, major hospitals are walking on thin ice as regards their stocks and supply of oxygen cylinders is limited. Many are managing on a day-to-day basis while some are battling with just hours of oxygen stocks left.

On Saturday, the state recorded 29,438 fresh cases, with Bengaluru Urban district alone accounting for 17, 342 cases.

The managements of hospitals are keeping their fingers crossed that they do not run out of stock in the dead of the night or when a patient suddenly needs it.

A doctor from Apollo Hospitals said, "It is literally a hand-to-mouth situtation. The demand has shot up five times compared to normal times. We have to keep a 24-hour reserve so that there is no shortage for patients. Earlier, if we needed 500 cubic metres of oxygen per day, the demand has now increased to 1,250 cubic metres. At present, we have 103 cubic metres stock in some of our hospitals." **P4**

**Strong Steps to Stop Spread**

With Bengaluru recording 1.5 lakh active cases, the Karnataka Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 has come out with a set of recommendations

- State Government must impose lockdown for 14 days to break the chain of infections
- Should increase beds by taking as much as possible from private medical colleges, nursing homes and hospitals
- Third Wave expected in October-November; Hence, vulnerable age groups must be vaccinated by then

**STATEWIDE**

| | APRIL 23 | APRIL 24 |
|---|---|---|
| Fresh cases | 26,962 | 29,438 |
| Active cases | 2,14,311 | 2,34,483 |
| Deaths | 190 | 208 |
| Recoveries | 8,697 | 9,058 |
| Fresh cases in B'luru Urban | 16,662 | 17,342 |

## 'Stricter curbs would have helped'

RAMU PATIL @ Bengaluru

FACED with criticism for not being adequately prepared for the second wave, Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar on Saturday pointed out that the double-mutant strain was responsible for the second wave, as it is more contagious. While agreeing that stricter measures, as suggested by the TAC, could have been taken three weeks ago, he reasoned that the government was faced with the task of saving livelihoods at the same time. **FULL INTERVIEW | P4**

**SOS MESSAGES FLOOD TWITTER**

**@Tarunvijay**
My elder cousin brother, 91, no plasma available, no oxygen cylinder. Hospital docs said- ghar le jaiye. #Faridabad. Where are we heading t ? Those without any connection, those who do not know any influential person, those who are just commoners,...

**@malini_aisola**
An Undertaking that loved ones are being asked to sign at @SarojHospital, Delhi hospital that says it is not the responsibility of the hospital if the patient dies due to scarcity of oxygen

**@JaiveerShergill**
Need hospital bed for a 8month pregnant lady -oxygen level has dipped to 84 and situation not looking good at all.. She is right now in Dwarka -Any leads please let me know!!

**@AdityaRajKaul #SOS DELHI**
Baby needs ventilator. In Critical State.
Ad-Nehru vihar Mustafabad Delhi
Age 2.2year
Please help, Delhi!!

**@sumeetbhasin**
Requirement of Plasma Donor on urgent basis of "A or AB" blood group.
Age -53 Years/ Female
Admitted in Fortis Hospital Shalimar Bagh

**thaman S @MusicThaman**
FIGHTING FOR LIFE
A VERY GOOD MUSICIAN
O+VE PLASMA
VERY URGENT
LOCATION -
DIYA HOSPITAL

# Air Force, Navy ferry oxygen tanks, medical staff for Covid fight

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

THE Union Government is deploying every available resource to tide over the oxygen emergency in the country. Given the urgency, the Railways, the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Indian Navy have been pressed into massive Covid-19 relief efforts.

"One C-17 aircraft of the IAF left for Changi International Airport, Singapore, from the Hindon Air Base at 2 am on April 24. It is on its way to offload four empty cryogenic oxygen containers at Panagarh in West Bengal," said IAF spokesperson Wing Commander Ashish Moghe.

"Another C-17 left Hindon Air Base for the Lohegaon Air Base in Pune for loading two empty cryogenic oxygen container trucks which were then flown to Jamnagar Air Base. The same -C17 aircraft is currently on its second shuttle from Pune to Jamnagar, with a load of two more empty containers," he added.

One C-17 aircraft transported two empty containers from Jodhpur to Jamnagar early on Saturday. One IAF Chinook helicopter and one AN-32 transport aircraft took Covid testing equipment from Jammu to Leh and from Jammu to Kargil, respectively. "The equipment consisted of bio -safety cabinets, centrifuges and stabilisers. These machines have been made by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and now given to the Union Territory of Ladakh to enhance testing," he added.

Meanwhile, taking into account the rise in Covid-19 cases in the Lakshadweep and Minicoy islands, the Southern Naval Command Headquarters at Kochi has deputed its Naval Ship INS Sharda as 'Oxygen Express' to ferry oxygen cylinders to the islands and also to bring back empty cylinders to the mainland for refilling them," said Defence chief spokesperson Commander Mehul Karnik. He added that a medical team comprising of two doctors, two nursing assistants, along with essential medical supplies, have also been provided through naval resources to augment medical support to the islands. **P7**

An oxygen container truck being loaded on to an IAF C-17 Globemaster heavylift transport aircraft | PTI

## *Covaxin at ₹600 for govts, ₹1.2k for pvt hosps*

NEW DELHI : Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech on Saturday announced that its Covid-19 vaccine, Covaxin, will cost ₹600 per dose to state governments and ₹1,200 per dose to private hospitals, two days after its competitor Serum Institute of India declared the procurement rate for Covishield through non-Central government channels. The company's vaccine will continue to be delivered to the Centre for ₹150 per dose. "We would like to state that more than 50% of our capacities have been reserved for Central government supplies," it said adding that the vaccine has a distinct feature of having a 28-day open vial policy. This means, once opened, the vaccine can be stored at 2-8 degree Celsius for 28 days.


WITH THIS ISSUE

THE COVID GENERATION

PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE

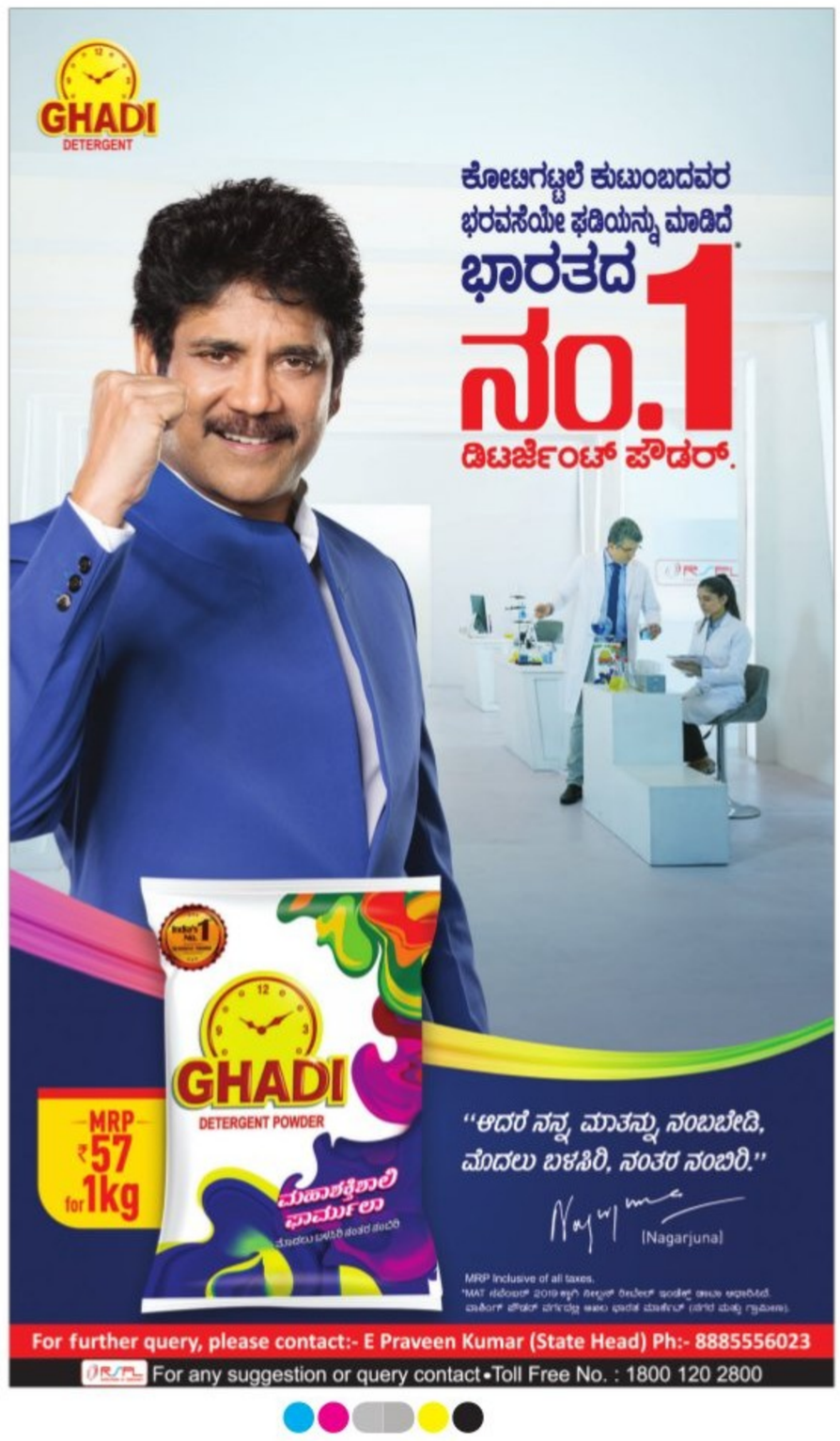

# Centre says ₹150/dose, SII says ₹400

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE confusion over the cost of Covishield vaccine doses continued on Saturday, with the Union Health Ministry saying it would keep procuring it at ₹150 per dose, while the Serum Institute of India had said on record earlier it would sell the vaccine at ₹400 to the Centre after its initial order is fulfilled.

The ministry's clarification came at a time when Covishield manufacturer SII is facing intense criticism over its differential pricing. As part of its new policy, the Centre had recently created two streams of procurement with 50% going to itself and the rest being shared by states and private hospitals. The SII had announced ₹400 as the cost per dose for states and ₹600 for private hospitals.

With the ministry and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh locked in a sparring match, the latter tweeted: "SII said ₹400 is the new price for ALL new govt procurements — States & Centre. What's the truth?" **CONTINUED ON: P7**

**RAMANA**

TAKES CHARGE AS CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

P8

# Sharp vegetable price crash singes farmers' hopes

A woman farmhand gets rid of the tomato crop in a field due to the steep fall in vegetable prices, in Chamarajanagar district on Saturday | UDAYSHANKAR S

K SHIVA KUMAR @ Mysuru

JUST when they were hoping for a bumper yield, after suffering huge losses last year during the first wave of Covid-19, farmers are finding themselves in dire straits again. The government has imposed strict curbs to control the spread of the highly infectious SARS-CoV2 virus.

The cap on number of attendees at weddings, ban on social gatherings, fairs and festivals have also badly affected the prospects of farmers.

Adding to their worries, there has been a noticeable dip in the movement of vehicles transporting vegetables and fruits to neighbouring Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Vegetables, that were being sold for a minimum of ₹20 per kg have now dropped sharply to under ₹10 per kg.

Farmers, who had invested heavily on crops like tomato, watermelon, beans, cabbage, ladies finger, cucumber, banana, etc., anticipating good returns, are shattered as they are forced to sell at throwaway prices. **CONTINUED ON: P5**

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS | BRIGHTSIDE

02 BENGALURU | SUNDAY 25.04.2021 | newindianexpress.com

ALMANAC TODAY
Sunday: 25/04/2021 • Year: Plava • Ayana: Uttharayana
Ritu: Vasantha • Masa: Chaitra • Paksha: Sukla • Tithi: Thrayodashi 2.00 pm
Nakshatra: Hastha 12.35 am • Moon in Tula Rashi • Rahukaala: 04:30 pm to 06:00 pm
Gulikakala: 03:00 pm to 04:30 pm • Yamaganda: 12:00 pm to 01:30 pm

WEATHER
MIN 22°C | MAX 32°C
FORECAST
Thunderstorms. Cloudy

Sunrise 6.01 am
Sunset 6.33 pm
Moonrise 4.56 pm
Moonset 4.31 am

THIS DHARWAD-BASED PHOTOGRAPHER RECREATES THE LIVES OF FREEDOM FIGHTERS

# TRACING THE FOOTSTEPS OF A HERO

*I just wanted to shoot such picture stories on freedom fighters and other inspirational people so that people don't forget them. It's a completely personal project for which my friends have supported me*
- Harshad Uday Kamath

AMIT S UPADHYE @Hubballi

A DHARWAD-based photographer has been following the footsteps of some of the people who have inspired him, and re-creating their lives in his own personal way to remind others that there are battles worth fighting for.

Meet photographer Harshad Uday Kamath, who hails from Kumta in Uttara Kannada, and recently put together a series of photographs that re-create the life of Chandrashekar Azad, who fought for independence from the British.

Harshad's photographs are unique because he researched the Madhya Pradesh-born freedom fighter's life and then captured Azad's personality and his activities in a series of striking black and white photographs: there is Azad the university scholar holding a book in a library; Azad the wrestler exercising with a traditional dumbbell; and Azad the revolutionary locked in a gun battle with the British at Alfred, now known as Azad Park; and one of Azad twirling his iconic moustache.

"I have been working on theme-based photo shoots for some time now," says Harshad, who has already done similar projects on the lives of other freedom fighters such as Sangolli Rayanna and Subhash Chandra Bose.

Just as with previous photo shoots, Harshad researched Azad's life. He read whatever he could find on the man. One particularly useful resource was a book on Azad authored by Babu Krishnamurthy.

"It was a great help in understanding the freedom fighter better. Azad was a sports person and a scholar as well. So there were a lot of possibilities on creating pictures of him since he was young," Harshad says.

Once he found his hero, Harshad needed a place where he could re-create the various aspects of his personality and his life, and Karnatak College in Dharwad was just the spot. "When I explained my ideas regarding the photo shoot, college authorities readily agreed," he says.

Harshad also needed a model who could represent the freedom fighter. He found the perfect model in 31-year-old business owner and social worker Shashi Hiremath. "It was really important to find the right model for the role. In the case of Azad, we found Shashi, who had a good build and was well-suited to play Azad," Harshad said, and joked, "But he had to lose his beard to play the part."

Armed with a good model and a suitable location, he shot the pictures using both natural and artificial lighting. On the day of the shoot, Harshad and his team went around the campus, including the library, to take pictures. What emerges is a portrait of Azad as a wrestler-athlete, an avid reader absorbed in a book, the student walking across his college campus, and the revolutionary who eventually shot himself on February 27, 1931, rather than allow himself to be captured by the British. "The majority of photos are about the last few hours of Azad's death," Harshad says.

For Shashi, it was an overwhelming experience to model as Chandrashekar Azad. "It is an honour. When Harshad came up with the idea, I readily agreed. It was well-received and several people congratulated me. A lot of people, my friends and even people I did not know, asked what I did for my physique and other things I did to prepare for the role," Shashi says.

Shashi believes that Harshad's theme-based photo projects have the potential to teach younger generations about the sacrifices made by freedom fighters.

**PICTURE STORIES ON FREEDOM FIGHTERS**

Ask Harshad why this project is so important to him, and pat comes the reply: "Many people thought I was doing this for a documentary. I just wanted to shoot such picture stories on freedom fighters and other inspirational people so that people don't forget them. It's a completely personal project for which my friends have supported me."

1. The iconic twirling-the-mustache pose of Chandrashekar Azad. 2. Azad aims at policemen. Before he shot himself, he managed to kill three cops and injure many. 3. Azad preferred to shoot himself than being captured by British. 4. A scholar from Kashi University, Azad is shown at the library | HARSHAD UDAY KAMATH

Mysurean picks up carcasses of dogs dying on ring roads & gives them a burial

# Giving them dignity in death

KARTHIK K K @ Mysuru

As soon as a message pops up on WhatsApp, or a call comes in, Umesh Vijayaraman picks up a pickaxe, shovel and other necessary equipment, jumps into his vehicle and hits the road. His mission is noble: to reach the stray dog run over by a speeding vehicle, and give it a dignified burial.

The WhatsApp picture is not pretty, and as he rushes to the spot, this dog lover shudders to think of thoughtless drivers running over and over the carcass. Such accidents are common on the ring roads around Mysuru, and burying the unfortunate dogs has become a routine for Umesh (45), who runs the Bow Bow Pet Resort on the Udbur-Sindhuvalli Road on the outskirts of Mysuru. Over the past six months, he says he has buried over 60 stray dogs which have died in roadkills.

It all started when Umesh frequently started spotting strays dogs killed in accidents on major ring roads, and vehicles running over the remains.

Having buried several pets in his pet cemetery, Umesh decided to take up this initiative as a social responsibility and plunged into action following the relaxation of the Covid-19 lockdown last October.

"When I was out on the ring roads, I would spot motorists running over the carcasses of dogs. Seeing this, I decided I must give these dogs a decent burial, and whenever I get information about such accidents, I rush there. I bury them near the plants on the medians of ring roads," said Umesh.

He points out that dumping of meat waste along these broad suburban roads, dysfunctional streetlights and rash driving by motorists are among the several reasons for deaths of strays dogs. "Many strays get attracted to the meat waste and run to consume it. While crossing the roads, they end up being run over by speeding vehicles. At night, the roads are badly lit and often motorists who are unable to spot them, end up hitting them," he said.

There is a need to instal signage and display boards on these roads where dogs often cross, says Umesh, adding that he is in talks with several organisations and NGOs to install boards at spots where roadkills are common. He plans to set up a similar system in Bengaluru and other cities across the country. He suggests that vehicle users who spot such carcasses, should stop and move them to the side of the road so that motorists don't run over the remains. It can also avoid accidents as some drivers suddenly brake or swerve on seeing a carcass in their path.

Though most of the time Umesh does this solo, he has a team of three – Suresh, Dr Prajwal and Vidushi -- who help him in this novel initiative, and also take on responsibility when he is not in town.

Umesh's Bow Bow Pet Resort holds the Limca record for collaring the maximum number of community dogs with reflective collars to prevent accidents, in 2019. "We are setting out to break our own Limca record and attempting it collar many more dogs in May, with scores of volunteers from Mysuru and Bengaluru," he said.

Umesh and his team member burying a dog on the Ring Road in Mysuru | UDAYSHANKAR S

**Many strays get attracted to the meat waste and run to consume it. While crossing the roads, they end up being run over by speeding vehicles**
Umesh Vijayaraman, Bow Bow Pet Resort

Umesh has one request for travellers rushing out and about Mysuru: If anyone spots a dead dog on the ring roads, WhatsApp the photo along with location to **9986284468.**

# BBMP CHIEF ISSUES NOTICE TO THREE PVT HOSPITALS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta visited three private hospitals -- Vikram, Shifaa and HBS Hospital -- on Saturday and served them notice for failing to reserve 50 per cent of their beds for government-referred Covid patients.

Interestingly, the hospital managements got a whiff of their visit and even before the chief commissioner and his team could reach, two of them added six more of their ICU beds for government-referred patients. However, the BBMP staff was not convinced and said that government orders should be adhered to and beds should be reserved immediately.

Looking at the sluggish response from private hospitals during the pandemic and the limited help being given to patients, Gupta ordered the formation of three teams, which will be tasked with visiting city hospitals and can even shut down OPDs if enough beds are not reserved.

"We require more ICU beds and all hospitals will have to make arrangements for it, there is no other option left. We can take over entire buildings under the Disaster Management Act, but we do not want to come down so heavily on them yet," Gupta said.

**STAY HOME, SAVE LIVES**

With the state going under a weekend lockdown to curb the spread of the virus, cops get busy checking vehicles on the roads, while the usually busy M G Road wears a deserted look on Saturday | VINOD KUMAR T

# Covid care: Students step in, bridge gap between demand and supply

PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA
@ Bengaluru

STUDENTS from Bengaluru have formed a team that is helping people find hospital beds, oxygen supply, plasma and ambulances over the past four days. With the help of various social media platforms, namely Twitter and Instagram, they are reaching out to patients in need.

Dhruv Jatti, founder of Bangalore Student Community (BSC), told TNIE that they are receiving over 200 requests for beds on a daily basis. So far, they have been able to find 36 beds due to the shortage in the system.

The team of over 75 students are collecting information about the supply of treatment essentials by going through the information they find online and are verifying them before feeding it into their database.

"We have a group of students gathering information. They send it to the verification team and then directly connect the patient," Dhruv added.

Tarika Vijayanagar, the Social Media Head of BSC said that it has been a busy time. "I have been able to help patients with leads regarding beds and plasma. I feel that as a student and the youth of the nation, I am responsible for helping people out as much as possible. The Task Force has also been active 24/7 and its unbelievable how much help we have been able to provide to those in need," she added.

"It's been four days and I have seen the group working day and night to get that one bed, one injection, one plasma donor. I am trying to do my best because as a student, this is my responsibility. It gets really exhausting when you call 50 hospitals at a go and still can't find any beds. We are bound to lose hope but we cant. We have seen our doctors working endlessly," said Sonia Agarwal, another student who has been part of the team.

Anuraag Shyamsunder, a student of Jindal School of Global Policy said that although the country is in a bad shape right now, ther are still hopes of bouncing back. He said that being at the centre of the task force, it has been a humbling experience for him to make an impact and save lives.

"I urge all students of the city, as well as the country, to join hands and fight the second wave head on," he added.

BLR STUDENT COMMUNITY
THE YOUTH CAN EMPOWER

**It's been four days and I have seen the group working day and night to get that one bed, one injection, one plasma donor. I am trying to do my best because as a student, this is my responsibility**
Sonia Agarwal, student

# Spit not, saliva carries disease

**POURAKARMIKAS AT RISK**

Dr Kunal Sharma, medical adviser to the government, said that spitting leads to many health conditions like flu, TB, HIV, meningitis, Covid and other air-borne diseases. Nalini Shekhar from Hasiru Dala said that people do not realise that pourakarimkas, who clean roads, are also cleaning spit, which only makes them more vulnerable to infections.

ENS @ Bengaluru

DID you know that Covid can spread when a person spits? Spitting is not just a social issue anymore. It has become a medical issue, which needs to be addressed and stopped immediately.

This was the unanimous statement made by NGOs across the country. They also agreed to disseminate this message in all their neighbourhoods. This was also the message at the #StopIndiaSpitting campaign launched by Beautiful Bengaluru, an NGO.

Speaking at the launch of the event, Odette Katrak, co-founder of Beautiful Bengaluru, said that though the government has acknowledged that spitting is a major issue, there are many gaps in on-ground preparedness, which need to be handled. "The state government has agreed that it is a critical issue. They have empowered marshals and health officials to penalise offenders, but citizens must also come forward and create awareness," he added.

The NGOs echoed that it should now become a social movement by involving every citizen, especially the youth.

# Nimhans to pay man over ₹5 Lakh for medical negligence

YATHIRAJU @ Bengaluru

THE National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (Nimhans) had to pay a compensation of Rs 5 lakh, along with Rs 25,000 litigation cost, to a city resident for medical negligence.

The Bangalore Urban II Additional District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission directed Nimhans to pay the said amount within 30 days from April 6, 2021, the date of the order, to Nagesh Rao, a resident of Basaveshwaranagar.

Rao had approached the Commission in 2009 with a complaint under the Consumer Protection Act against the Director and Registrar of Nimhans, for negligence which led to an injury in his esophageal tract.

The Commission comprising president KS Bilagi and member V Anurdha said that the complainant had claimed a compensation of Rs 25 lakh, which was an exorbitant amount. They further said that although Rao has proved negligence on the part of Nimhans, he failed to prove further disability with regard to loss of control over both legs, hands and loss of income.

Rao was admitted to Nimhans after complaining of severe neck pain. His food pipe was injured after a surgery.

The Karnataka High Court said that the State Government will have to constitute a Special Investigation Team to probe child trafficking in the city, and take a stand on the recommendations made by the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority

# Cops barricade inner roads, delay ambulances

Drivers are forced to find alternative routes to patients' addresses; road barriers put up without alerting hospitals

MANJU SHETTAR @Bengaluru

THE police setting up barricades across roads to restrict people from driving or riding around during the first weekend curfew, has led to a severe problem — ambulance drivers are forced to find alternative routes to patients' addresses.

At a time when roads are supposed to be freed up for easy movement of ambulances, these barricades are posing a big problem.

Quite a few ambulance drivers faced problems on Saturday. One of them, Mahesh, who drives a '108' ambulance said, "It was around 2.30pm and I was looking for a patient's house in Cox Town, and found many barricades on the main road and interior roads of the residential area. I managed to reach after a while and took short-cuts and finally reached Vaidehi Hospital."

An ambulance makes its way through a roadblock during the statewide weekend lockdown, in Bengaluru on Saturday | VINOD KUMAR T

Prateek Rao, a resident of Malleswaram, said, "I noticed an ambulance with sirens blaring and lights flashing, taking a U-turn after being blocked by barricades on the road connecting with Sampige Road. He was searching for a house to pick up a patient. I don't understand why the police have put so many barricades on roads in the interiors of residential areas, making it difficult for ambulances to move around, especially when they are in an emergency."

A senior police officer from North Division said, "We have put up 35 checkpoints in our division and did not notice any inconvenience for ambulances. We have even pulled aside barricades on seeing ambulances around Yeshwanthpur and Malleswaram."

However, there are many spots across the city where barricades remain standing and chained to each other, with no policeman in sight to pull them aside when an ambulance comes that way.

Another ambulance driver, who did not want to be identified, said "We need to be at the destination in as short a time as possible. Police put up barricades, but don't tell us where they have set them up, and when we get calls, we have to rush. How will we know where the barricades are until we come face-to-face with them. If there are policemen, they remove them for us. But in many places we have to hunt for an alternate route."

BR Ravikante Gowda, Joint Commissioner for Traffic, was not available for comment and did not pick any calls.

A woman speaks to a staffer of Bowring Hospital on Saturday | VINOD KUMAR T

# 80% beds in private hosps to be reserved

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

IN a big push to meet the growing challenge posed by the raging second wave of the pandemic, Health and Medical Education Minister Dr K Sudhakar said a decision was taken to increase reservation of beds for Covid-19 patients in private hospitals and medical colleges from 50 per cent to 80 per cent, and an order in this regard would be out soon.

A decision was also taken to establish 2,000-bed makeshift ICUs with ventilators in the precincts of tertiary hospitals in Bengaluru. In his interaction with Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Friday night, it was decided that some districts -- Mysuru, Hubballi, Bidar, Belagavi and Shivamogga – will get makeshift hospitals with modular ICUs, with a capacity of about 250 beds. "This will start in 15 days. In Bengaluru, the biggest deficit is that of ventilators in ICU beds, so we will develop this at the earliest. As there is global demand, efforts are being made to import ventilators and equipment," he said.

Seeking to pacify fears of a mounting death toll, Sudhakar said, "That Covid-19 will cause breathing issues and death among all is a myth. Just 3-4 per cent have breathing problems. Beds and oxygen have to be arranged for them. Those who are asymptomatic and occupy hospital beds out of fear, are depriving those who actually need them."

"Tele-consultation centres started with a strength of 100-150 doctors will be increased to 500 doctors working in two shifts to guide those quarantined at home. When they are cured, it will convince people that we are taking care of those in their homes too," Sudhakar said.

EARLY START

# Congress prepares for 2022 MLC elections

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

KPCC president D K Shivakumar has written to all district unit presidents to collect applications from aspirants who want to contest the MLC election for Teachers and Graduates constituencies, by May 15, 2021. The election is due in July 2022.

In a letter addressed to district presidents of Mysuru , Belagavi, Chamarajanagar, Vijayapura, Bagalkote, Dharwad, Haveri, Mandya and Hassan, along with MPs and MLAs, Shivakumar said they should prepare a list of aspirants who want to contest the four MLC elections (two Teachers and two Graduates constituencies).

The four constituencies -- Karnataka Northwest Teachers constituency, Karnataka Northwest Graduates constituency, Karnataka South Teachers and Karnataka West Graduates constituency -- are represented by non-Congress members, and Shivakumar is keen to get these seats for the Congress next year.

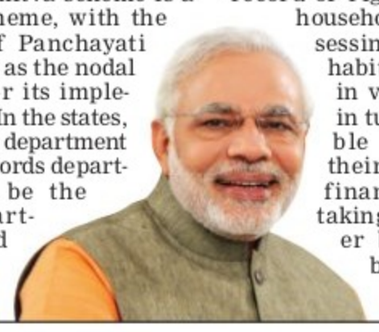
He also mentioned that the Election Commission will be revising the electoral list next month. "We do not want to lose any seats in any election as we will be facing the 2024 assembly elections. It is, important to start the election process right now."

# MODI LAUNCHES SWAMITVA SCHEME FOR LAND RECORDS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched the Swamitva scheme in Karnataka on the occasion of National Panchayat Raj Day. Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa participated in the virtual launch from his official quarters, Kaveri.

The Swamitva scheme is a Central scheme, with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) as the nodal ministry for its implementation. In the states, the Revenue department or Land Records department will be the nodal department and shall implement the scheme with support from the state Panchayat Raj department.



The Survey of India shall work as the technology partner for implementation.

The scheme aims to provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India. The demarcation of rural abadi areas would be done using drone survey, to provide the 'record of rights' to village household owners possessing houses in inhabited rural areas in villages which, in turn, would enable them to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans and other benefits from banks.

RDPR Commissioner Priyanka Mary and Sridhar CN, additional director, Survey department, and other officials from the Union ministry also participated.

An official source said, "The scheme seeks to achieve financial stability for citizens in rural India, by enabling them to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits, creating accurate land records for rural planning, determination of property tax, creation of survey infrastructure and GIS maps that can be used by any department to prepare development plans and also reduce property related disputes and legal cases."

This scheme was officially launched nationally in New Delhi about a year ago.

EXPRESS READ

## RSS sets up samitis to fight Covid in Karnataka

Bengaluru: The RSS has set up Jana Jagrutua Samitis across the state to create awareness in fighting Covid. The RSS has held several virtual meetings over the past few days to deal with the pandemic. At a national level baithak on April 18, RSS regional units discussed their readiness to deal with the pandemic. Later, RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale issued a statement on creating awareness on mass hygiene and physical distancing. ENS

Applications are invited for **Two Young Professional-1** posts at ICAR-Central Potato Research Station, Udhagamandalam, The Nilgiris, Tamilnadu.

For more details please visit the website **https://cpri.icar.gov.in/**

भारतीय विज्ञान शिक्षा एवं अनुसंधान संस्थान कोलकाता
मोहनपुर - 741 246, जिला : नदीया, पश्चिम बंगाल
IISER Kolkata
**Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Kolkata**
Mohanpur - 741 246, Dist : Nadia, West Bengal

**Advt. No.: IISER-K/Admn./NT-Rec./2021/01 Dated 25.04.2021**

Applications are invited from eligible Indian Nationals for **One (1)** post of **Deputy Registrar (on Deputation)** for a period of **3 (Three)** years in **Pay Level-12.**

For futher details, please visit the Institute website **http://apply.iiserkol.ac.in/jobs**

The last date for submission of hard copy of application is **24th May, 2021** upto **17:30** hrs.

**Registrar**

**SOUTHERN RAILWAY**
MATERIALS MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT
CENTRAL WORKSHOPS,
SOUTHERN RAILWAY,
PONMALAI, TRICHY – 620 004

**E – Tender Notice for the supply of Stores – No.GOC/Stores/E/17/2021**

The following e-tender has been published in IREPS website. Firms are requested to Login to **http://www.ireps.gov.in->login->E.Tender->Goods & Services (New)** and quote against the tender. Manual quotations will not be entertained. **Closing time: 14:30 hours**

**Tender No.: 52211144 Description: VRLA TYPE 120 AH CAPACITY BATTERIES. Due date: 11-MAY-2021**

**Attention : Micro Small Medium Enterprises [MSMEs].** The benefits provided to MSMEs under Public Procurement Policy for goods and services are as per details provided in the link **http://www.ireps.gov.in -> ireps public documents -> Southern Railway**

**Dy.Chief Materials Manager Goldenrock**

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**SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY**
**Employment Notice No. CMP/06/Covid-19/GAZ/2021**
**WALK-IN-INTERVIEW**

South Western Railway, Mysuru Division proposes to engage full time Medical Practitioners (Specialist), GDMO for a period of 03 months or upto 30.06.2021, Staff Nurse and Pharmacists on contract basis for a period 03 months or upto 31.07.2021 whichever is earlier on Covid-19 account for Mysuru Division, South Western Railway.

**1. No. of Vacancies:** CMP (Specialist): 02 posts, CMP (GDMO) : 12 posts, Staff Nurse: 30 posts, Pharmacist: 02 posts.

**2. Place at which service required:** Covid Isolation Ward, Railway Hospital, Mysuru and Covid Coaches over Mysuru Division.

**3. Venue and Date of Walk-In-Interview:** Office of the Senior Divisional Personnel Officer, Divisional Railway Manager's Office, Irwin Road, Mysuru. **Date : 04.05.2021 (Tuesday) from 11.00 hrs onwards upto 17:00 hrs.**

For details log on: www.swr.indianrailways.gov.in

**Senior Divisional Personnel Officer, Mysuru**
PUB/30/AAV/PRB/SWR/2021-22

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT & PANCHAYATI RAJ
(Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India)
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad – 500 030

**ADMISSION OPEN – EXTENSION OF LAST DATE**

**Post Graduate Diploma in Management (Rural Management) 2021-23 (TWO YEARS - APPROVED BY AICTE) and Post Graduate Diploma in Rural Development Management 2021-22 (ONE YEAR)**

Last date for receipt of applications through online is extended to **20.05.2021** with revised admission process for selection. Candidates who are yet to clear final year of degree examination in 2020-21 may also apply.

For further details please visit **www.nirdpr.org.in**
E-mail: cpgs.nird@gov.in

BEFORE THE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-II AT BANGALORE
No.4, LIC Jeevan Mangal Building, Residency Road, Bangalore 560 025
**O. A. No. 413 / 2019**

**BETWEEN: BANK OF BARODA** (Earlier Dena Bank) JC Road Branch, No.2, Corporation Shops, JC Road, Bangalore 560 002. ...Applicant
**AND: SRI. SATHEESHA H M** ...Defendant

**Summons issued under Rule 23(viii) of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure) Rules 1993 to the Defendant**

Whereas, the Applicant has instituted an application under section 19 of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993, against you for recovery of a sum of **Rs.35,90,401/- (Rupees Thirty Five Lakhs Ninety Thousand Four Hundred and One Only),** together with current and future interest and other reliefs.

You are hereby required to show cause within 30 days from the date of publication of this summons or on the **03.08.2021 at 10.30 A. M.** in person or by a Pleader/Advocate duly instructed as to why the reliefs prayed for should not be granted. Take notice that in case of default the Application will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of this Tribunal on this the 18th day of April, 2021.

**BY ORDER OF TRIBUNAL Registrar, Debts Recovery Tribunal-II, Bangalore**

**To: SRI. SATHEESHA H M**
S/o Sri Mahadevanna, No.292, 3rd Main Road, 3rd Cross, Vigneswarnagar, Near Arunodaya School, Sunkadakatte, Bangalore 560091. Also at E-776, 3rd Floor, Bhrath Nagar, Magadi Main Road, 14th Cross, Opposite East-West College, Sunkadakatte, Bangalore 560091.

**KARNATAKA STATE ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION**
'Sarige Bhavana', Central Offices- Dept. Accounts, K.H. Road, Shanthinagar, Bengalore.

**No.:KST:CO:ACC:BS/LOAN/315:2021-22 DATE : 24.04.2021**

**EXTENSION OF LAST DATE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST**

**Sub :** Expression of interest for Rs. 220 Crore Term Loan: Extension of last date for submission of quotes.

**Ref.: No.: KST:CO:ACC:BS:LOAN:224:2021-22, dated 17.04.2021.** Expression of interest for sanction of Rs. 220 Cr. Loan was called vide notification referred to above. In view of the prevailing condition due to spread of second wave of COVID-19, **The last date for submissoin of the quotes has been extended till 07.05.2021.**

DIPR/DDU/JA/270/2021-22 **Sd/- Cheif Accounts Officer cum F.A.**

COVID-19. DO NOT PANIC, BE AWARE
Wear Mask | 6 Feet Follow Physical Distancing | Maintain Hand Hygiene

**KOTESHWARA SAHAKARI BANK NIYAMITHA**
No. 12/2, 'Vishwothama', 2nd Main Road, Sheshadripuram, Bangalore-560 020
Email: jpnagar@koteshwarabank.com

**POSSESSION NOTICE** (for Immovable Property)

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of Koteshwara Sahakari Bank Niyamitha, No.27, 1st Floor, Puttenahalli Main Road, J P Nagar 7th Phase, Bengaluru-560078 under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 had issued a Demand Notice dated **03.02.2021** calling upon the Borrower, owner of the property **Sri. Suresh Robert S/o Sri. Raja Residing at No. 47/A, MBVS Apartment, Flat No. 401, 3rd Cross, 3rd Main, N S Palya, BTM Layout 2nd Stage, Bengaluru-560076 and Guarantor Smt. Jennifer W/o Sri. Suresh Robert Residing at No. 47/A, MBVS Apartment, Flat No. 401, 3rd Cross, 3rd Main, N S Palya, BTM Layout 2nd Stage, Bengaluru-560076 to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 49,33,653.12/ (Rupees Fourty Nine lakhs Thirty Three Thousand Six Hundred Fifty Three and Twelve Paisa only)** as on 31.01.2021 with further interest from **01.02.2021** within **60 days** from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The Borrower / Guarantor, owners of the property having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to borrower, owner of the property and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 8 of the Security (Enforcement) Rules 2002 on this **20th April 2021.**

The Borrower/Guarantor/owner's attention is invited to the provisions of sub section (8) of the section 13 of the Act in respect of time available to redeem the Security Assets/Secured Assets.

The Borrower/Guarantor/owner's of property, in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Koteshwara Sahakari Bank Niyamitha, No.27, 1st Floor, Puttenahalli Main Road, J P Nagar 7th Phase, Bengaluru-560078 for an amount of **Rs. 49,33,653.12/ (Rupees Fourty Nine lakhs Thirty Three Thousand Six Hundred Fifty Three and Twelve Paisa only)** as on 31.01.2021 and further interest accrued and other charges from **01.02.2021** thereon.

**Description of the Immovable Property**
**Details of Mortgage property in the name of Sri. Suresh Robert**

All the piece and parcel of Residential Immovable Property bearing Site No.47/A, Old No.41/47, Situated at Nayanappa Shetty Palya (N.S.Palya) Village, Begur Hobli, Bangalore South taluk, now comes within the limits of Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike, BTM Layout Ward No.65 and assigned the property as New Municipal No.6 (old No.47/A-41-47). Having Property PID No. 65-358-6, of 3rd Cross, Rashtrakavi Kuvempu Nagara, Bangalore. Measuring East to West : (50.0+67.0)/2 feet, North to South : 95.0 feet in all measuring 5557.5 Square Feet and bounded on the :-

**East by :** House belongs to Chikka Byappa **West by:** House belongs to Kempamma
**North by:** Road **South by:** House belongs to Krishnappa

**SCHEDULE "C"**

A Residential Apartment bearing **Flat No.401 (3 BHK),** in Fourth Floor, East Facing, Measuring 1285 Sq. Feet of Super Built Area, in the Apartment building known as "NISHITA'S MBVS, constructed in the Schedule 'B' herein above together with 326 Sq. feet of undivided share, right, title, interest and ownership and sital area comprising of flat consisting of Three bed Rooms, hall, Dining Kitchen, Balcony, Utility, Bath room and Toilets, consisting of Flush shutter with hardwoods frames, Main door Teak wood frame and shutter and Aluminum Windows, having vitrified flooring and one car parking marked as at Stilt/Basement floor in Schedule 'A' Property and Bounded on the :

**East by :** House belongs to Chikka Byappa **West by:** House belongs to Kempamma
**North by:** Road **South by:** Flat No.402.

**Date: 20.04.2021** **Authorised Officer**
**Place: Bangalore** **Koteshwara Sahakari Bank Niyamitha**

**homefirst** We'll take you home

**Home First Finance Company India Limited**
CIN:U65990MH2010PTC240703,
Website: homefirstindia.com, Phone No.: 180030008425
Email ID: loanfirst@homefirstindia.com

**DEMAND NOTICE U/s 13(2)**

You the below mentioned borrower has availed loan by mortgaging the schedule mentioned property and you the below mention has stood as borrower/co- borrower guarantor for the loan agreement. Consequent to the defaults committed by you, your loan account has been classified as non- performing asset on **05/04/2021** under the provisions of the Securitisation & Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (in short SARFAESI Act). We **Home First Finance Company India Limited** have issued Demand Notice u/s 13(2) read with section 13(13) of the SARFAESI Act to the address furnished by you. The said notices are issued as on 20/04/2021and these notices state that you have committed default in payment of the various loans sanctioned to you. Therefore, the present publication carried out to serve the notice as the provision of Section 13(2) of SARFAESI Act and in terms of provision to the rule 3(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002:

| Name and Address of the Account, Borrower(s) & Guarantor(s) | Details of the security to be enforced | Amount due as on20-04-2021 as per Demand Notice plus further interest and other expenses. |
|---|---|---|
| SUNITA RATHOD and NAMDEV RATHOD | Provident Wellworth City, Flat No. 408, Block No. G-12, Kadathanamale Village, Hesaraghatta Hobli, Doddaballapur Main Road, Bangalore North, Bangalore – 561203 | Rs. 13,79,439/- |

You are hereby called upon to pay **Home First Finance Company India Limited** within the period of 60 days from the date of publication of this Notice the aforesaid amount with interest and cost failing which **Home First Finance Company India Limited** will take necessary action under the Provisions of the said Act against all or any one or more of the secured assets including taking possession of secured assets of the borrowers, mortgagors and the guarantors. The power available to the **Home First Finance Company India Limited** under the said act include (1) Power to take possession of the secured assets of the borrowers/guarantors including the rights to transfer by way of lease, assignment of sale for releasing secured assets (2) Take over management of the secured assets including rights to transfer by ways of lease, assignment or sale and realize the secured assets and any transfer as of secured assets by **Home First Finance Company India Limited** shall vest in all the rights and relation to the secured assets transferred as it the transfer has been made by you.

In terms of the Provisions of the Section 13(13) of the said act, you are hereby prohibited from transferring, either by way of sale, lease or otherwise (other than in the normal course of your business), any of the secured assets as referred to above and hypothecated/mortgaged to the **Home First Finance Company India Limited** without prior consent of the **Home First Finance Company India Limited.**

**Place: Bangalore,** **Signed by: AUTHORISED OFFICER,**
**Date: 25/04/2021** **Home First Finance Company India Limited**

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THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

COVID-19

04 BENGALURU SUNDAY 25.04.2021

TRACKING COVID-19

SPEED AND RISE OF COVID-19 CASES IN KARNATAKA

29,438 CASES REPORTED TODAY

26,962 CASES REPORTED YESTERDAY

TALLY STANDS AT

TODAY 13,04,397

YESTERDAY 12,74,959

DEATHS

TODAY 208 YESTERDAY 190

DISCHARGES

TODAY 9,058 YESTERDAY 8,697

ACTIVE CASES

TODAY 2,34,483

YESTERDAY 2,14,311

POSITIVITY RATE

TODAY 15.52

YESTERDAY 15.87

MORTALITY RATE

TODAY 0.90

YESTERDAY 1.12

RECOVERY RATE

TODAY 80.92

YESTERDAY 83.16

The first Covid-19 case in Karnataka was reported on March 8, 2020. Since then till April 24, 2021, a total of 13,04,397 cases have been reported in 1 year and 47 days

85,63,208 A total of people have been vaccinated across the state

VACCINATION DRIVE STATUS

| | |
|---|---|
| Healthcare workers 1st dose | 6,67,251 |
| Healthcare workers 2nd dose | 4,13,209 |
| Frontline warriors 1st dose | 3,37,383 |
| Frontline warriors 2nd dose | 1,30,845 |
| Age 45-60 1st dose | 31,18,084 |
| Age 45-60 2nd dose | 1,51,443 |
| Above 60 1st dose | 32,94,617 |
| Above 60 2nd dose | 4,50,376 |

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

# 'If we had taken steps earlier, we would be in control now'

RAMU PATIL

*Then (first wave), people followed Covid-appropriate behaviour like wearing masks and minimising social activities. But this time, people seem to have lowered their guard after the vaccine was found*

Dr K Sudhakar, Health Minister

WITH Covid patients struggling to get hospital beds, oxygen and drugs, the State Government is working on a war-footing to fight the pandemic. Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar told *TNSE* in an interview that the double-mutant strain in the second wave is spreading faster as it is more contagious. The government is taking all measures to ensure every Covid patient gets treatment. Medical infrastructure in the state, including testing labs, ventilators and ICUs, has been upgraded significantly in the last one year and it is being strengthened further, he said. Excerpts...

**How different is the second wave compared to the first one? What are the major reasons for the surge?**

The first wave initially spread slowly because of early stringent measures taken by the government, like complete lockdown, and strong vigilance by citizens. Then, people mostly followed Covid-appropriate behaviour like wearing masks and minimising social activities. But this time, people seem to have lowered their guard after the vaccine was found. They have also engaged themselves in economic activities. The double-mutant strain in the second wave is further contributing to the spread as it is more contagious.

**Are we taken by surprise? The Technical Advisory Committee had warned of the second wave and you too kept cautioning against letting our guards down.**

The TAC had advised us about the second wave and also suggested strict measures. But the government had a challenging task of striking a balance between saving lives and livelihoods. We took a calibrated approach, instead of a complete lockdown. I agree that if we had perhaps taken the measures that we took now about three weeks ago, we would have been in a better position.

**We are witnessing the same problems we faced during the first wave, like shortage of beds. Why did we not make adequate preparation when we had time? What is being done to increase bed strength now?**

Our medical infrastructure, be it testing labs, beds, ventilators or ICUs, has been stepped up significantly. Last year in February, we had only two labs for testing, we now have 192, with a capacity to test nearly 2.5 lakh to 3 lakh samples a day. Since March 2020, oxygenated beds have been increased from 1,970 to 23,884.

**The supply of oxygen and Remdesivir seems to be a big challenge. What is being done to overcome the shortage?**

The State Government has already placed an order for 70,000 vials of Remdesivir, and we have started receiving the consignments. The Centre had allocated additional 25,000 vials to Karnataka till April 30 which will be received later. We are trying to directly import two lakh vials in bulk. I have personally spoken to Biocon MD Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw for additional procurement. Karnataka has been allocated six oxygen plants with 100 LPM (litres per minute) capacity each under the PM Cares Fund, which are being installed at government hospitals in Pavagada in Tumakuru district, Shikaripura in Shivamogga district, Mudhol in Bagalkot district, Yellapura in Uttara Kannada district, Chincholi in Kalaburagi district and Shorapur in Yadgir district. All the plants have received the equipment and are expected to be operational by the month-end. The State Government is installing 40 plants, of which 10 are of 500 LPM capacity and 30 plants of 390 LPM capacity. A dedicated war room has been set up at the Drugs Controller office to streamline oxygen supply. The installed capacity in the State is around 870 metric tonnes, while the estimate of requirement is 1,500 MT by May-end. Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa has already requested the Centre to allocate about 1,400 MT to Karnataka. We have directed industries to divert maximum amount of industrial oxygen for medical purposes.

**Have we hit the peak or the numbers likely to go up further?**

I don't want to speculate on the peak, but experts estimate that we will have this second wave till May-end or June first week.

**Many countries are facing or have gone through the third wave. Is it a concern here?**

Yes, the third wave is a possibility. The vaccine is our biggest weapon to prevent it. We are administering the vaccines at around 6,000 sites and have also allowed workplaces to vaccinate. Since the vaccine is open to all above 18 years from May 1, we will accelerate the drive. I have already spoken to CII, FKCCI and requested them to actively participate in the drive to ensure that all their employees and their families are vaccinated. The chief minister has already approved the purchase of one crore doses of vaccine and earmarked Rs 400 crore for it.

**Do you think the weekend curfew will help contain the spread or do we have to consider a full lockdown?**

The government has to strike a balance between keeping the economy running and fighting the pandemic. This is part of that calibrated approach. We will review the situation again after May 4.

# State gasps as second wave hits hard

TEAM TNIE

WITH a whopping 29,438 cases added to push the state's Covid tally over the 13-lakh mark and the number of cases currently under treatment to 2,34,483 on Saturday, the demand for oxygen has shot up. According to the data on hospitalised patients, the requirement of oxygen in the ongoing second wave is higher at 54.5 per cent than 41.1 percent in the first wave.

Of the active cases, 1,280 patients are in ICU, but many non-ICU patients too are in need of oxygen beds as their oxygen saturation levels are low. There have been many instances of patients not getting the life-saving gas. In the second wave, people are coming down with breathlessness and depleted oxygen levels. The fear of lack of oxygen and hospital beds has created a panic among people.

Bengaluru has emerged as the epicentre of oxygen tragedy, mainly because the demand has spiralled. On Saturday, the city saw a whopping 17,342 fresh Covid cases, taking the tally to 6,32,923. With such a surge in cases, the demand for oxygen in the city has gone up five times, say doctors from some reputed hospitals. Hospitals are reporting a "hand-to-mouth" existence in terms of oxygen at present. But they are scared of a scenario where cases multiply and the health infrastructure not able to meet the demand for oxygen.

Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research, Balram Bhargava explains that one of the reasons for oxygen shortage is the panic among people and an increase in the number of admissions even among those who don't require hospitalisation.

In Mysuru, despite district in-charge minister ST Somashekhar's insistence that there is no dearth of oxygen or beds, many patients have died because of non-availability of oxygen beds and ventilators at several private and government hospitals. Though district administration says that over 50 high-flow nasal oxygen beds, 443 oxygenated beds, 46 ventilators and 68 ICU beds are vacant, most private hospitals have been denying admission, citing non-availability of beds.

Senior citizens, especially those with comorbidities and low oxygen levels, are denied admission, forcing them to knock on the doors of officials concerned. But with precious time lost, they either end up dead or suddenly require ICU beds with the condition worsening — all because oxygen was denied to them at the right moment.

Chief Secretary P Ravi Kumar says the oxygen shortage is being felt acutely in smaller hospitals. "Big hospitals do not have any shortage because they have oxygen tanks. It is the smaller hospitals that are facing an acute shortage because they use oxygen cylinders, which are refilled every third day. Refilling takes time," he says. But TNSE found that even big hospitals have started feeling the pinch now.

"The problem is multifold. There is a serious issue with distribution and supply. The State has 94 tankers and almost all are now transporting oxygen. With an unprecedented daily caseload, the hospitals may require more oxygen, but they don't have the infrastructure to store or use it. Many private hospitals have written to the government that while they can increase the bed strength further, they don't have the logistics to store or use additional oxygen," says Kumar.

There are eight units in Ballari and Vijayanagara. Each of which are capable of producing 30-40 tonnes of oxygen per day. The steel major JSW itself has four oxygen producing units. These units manufacture nearly half of all the oxygen produced in the two districts. "For the last one month, the production has been doubled in these plants. Workers are being paid double for overtime," said an official from the industries department.

The four plants in Ballari — Air Water India (formerly known as Praxair India), JSW Industrial Gases, Linde India and Bellary Oxygen Company — have upped their daily oxygen output from 200 metric tonnes (MT) per day to 400-425 MT. Till July 2020, their daily output was between 120 and 150 MT. The plants have optimised their production and are willing to further upgrade, but there is no infrastructure to support accelerated manufacture, supply and distribution of oxygen. Mainly, Bengaluru and Mysuru are facing the shortage of oxygen. Other parts of the state, with comparatively lower cases and faster access to oxygen, are better off.

BIG PICTURE

For instance, in Uttara Kannada, the only Oxygen supplier in Kumta taluk is catering to the needs of all Covid hospitals in the district. The administration has ensured that there is no scarcity at any hospital. "We have started producing three times more Oxygen than earlier to meet the requirement of the district. We have canceled supplies to other industries and are focusing only on hospitals," says Yash Momaya, who owns the oxygen supply company, Padma Gas Agency.

The private unit at Bettaguli in Kumta taluk caters to oxygen requirements of Karwar Institute of Medical Sciences and other private hospitals. "Earlier, we used to supply 200 cylinders every day, now we are supplying 600 cylinders. The district administration has asked us to boost the production further," he says. The company has a storage plant and ensures there is no scarcity in the district.

Similarly, there is no shortage in Vijayapura and Bagalkot districts too. Vijayapura District Health Officer Rajkumar Yaragal says, "We are not facing the shortage as majority of Covid-infected persons are asymptomatic and are under home isolation. There are less than 40 per cent active cases in hospitals. The district civil hospital also has a liquid medical oxygen plant, which has a capacity of 6,000 litres. Apart from this, we also have the continuous supply of jumbo cylinders."

Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa's home district Shivamogga too has not faced any shortage of oxygen so far. The District McGann Hospital is equipped with 1,180 oxygen beds. According to District Surgeon Dr Shreenivas G, 180 oxygen beds are occupied. Fortunately, the district has not witnessed deaths due to shortage of oxygen and no patient has suffered. "Oxygen is refilled every alternate day. There is a liquid oxygen plant at Shikaripura, which ensures there is no shortage in the district," he says.

Oxygen suppliers at Nipani and Belagavi have also been instructed to keep medical oxygen available ready for supplies to government and private hospitals of Belagavi.

*Inputs from Bala Chauhan; Kiran Balannanavar; Subhash Chandra N S; Mahesh Goudar; Sunil Patil*

# 10% of CCCs to soon have $O_2$ beds

Some beds at Covid Care Centres which are being set up wilsl have oxygen beds

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

TO ensure that people do not rush to hospitals, especially private ones, for oxygen, all Covid Care Centres (CCCs) will have oxygen beds at the earliest.

Chief Secretary P Ravi Kumar on Saturday said that it has been decided that at least 10 per cent of all beds in CCCs will have oxygen beds. He was speaking to the media after visiting the East zone war room to take stock of the ground situation. "Work on setting up oxygen supply in all CCCs immediately has already started," Kumar said.

Earlier in the day, the chief secretary held a meeting with all officials, where it was decided that the issue of timely availability of drugs, beds, tele services, Covid-19 test reports and availability if ambulances is addressed immediately. In the meeting, the officials cut a sorry figure on the poor situation and the lapses in the system, where common citizens were forced to use influence to get basic medical attention in this pandemic. The officials are said to have assured the chief secretary to correct all issues by Monday evening.

In wake of the poor response to the 108 helpline, Kumar said that the number of lines on 1912 were being increased and it was being made as a centralised service point now.

BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta said that 30 more lines were being added to 1912 and the total will be 60. He added work on oxygen supply for half of the beds at the Haj Bhavan CCC had started two days back and at the veterinary college in Hebbal on Friday. All other CCCs will get them in 2-3 days, Gupta added.

Following reports of labs not uploading test reports on time and delaying BU numbers, four labs were slapped notices and orders to close them were issued.

On the supply of Remdivisir, Ravi Kumar said that the government has stocks, but a regulation has been put on private hospitals. On complaints of shortage of supply for patients, it has been decided that a centralised number will be introduced.

# After losing mom, sisters hunt for $O_2$ for ailing dad

AJITH M S @Mysuru

WHILE authorities insist that the pandemic is under control in Mysuru, two women lost their mother on April 15 as they could not find a bed in time. Now they are scouting for an oxygen cylinder for their 68-year-old father. For those who think that the situation on oxygen and beds is critical only in Bengaluru, they are wrong.

According to Padmaja, their father is getting discharged but requires oxygen even during home isolation as his saturation level is only 90. They dialed at least 10 places for an oxygen cylinder, but to no avail. "Every supplier gave us reasons not to supply oxygen," said Padmaja, who is recovering from the loss of her mother Shantala.

Shantala was reportedly not admitted at 15 to 20 hospitals and doctors "hesitated" to even look at her since her oxygen saturation level had dropped to 54 per cent, while the RT-PCR report was negative. She had developed symptoms like backache and leg pain on April 7, but none of the doctors suggested a Covid test for her, the sisters said.

"Our father too was negative, but he was admitted in a Covid ward as he had the saturation level close to 90. But the same hospitals refused to admit our mother, citing her condition and claiming that beds were not available," said Padmaja.

# Govt trying to ensure there's no shortage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

THE situation in Manipal Hospital is also no different. While some of the Manipal hospitals said they have sufficient stock, many others said that they were walking on a tightrope. The managements were, however, unable to give out details about their stock and supply.

In the case of Fortis Hospitals, the bigger hospitals were helping the smaller ones to ensure that there is no shortage of oxygen. "On average, we need 500 litres daily. But now, the demand has doubled in large hospitals and, in smaller ones, they are still trying to manage with 300-500 litres even though there is a capacity of 600 litres. At least 100 litres are being kept as reserve," a doctor from Fortis said. "Due to shortage of oxygen in other private hospitals, they are referring their patients to us and we are accommodating them as a personal and medical obligation," he added.

Doctors at St John's Hospital said there is a demand for 250 cubic metres of oxygen per day, but the supply has been low. They said they have limited stocks and are not able to take in more patients. To ensure that they do not run dry, they are forced to switch off supply when a patient is not using — while eating or when using the washroom, etc .

A photograph of Udupi DC G Jagadish (second from left) attending the mehndi ceremony without a mask on Friday evening has gone viral on social media

# Udupi DC slammed for not wearing mask at pvt event

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Udupi

UDUPI Deputy Commissioner G Jagadish, who is at the forefront of fighting Covid and imposing pandemic-related norms across the district, is in the soup for posing for a photograph without the mask at the mehndi programme of Udupi district Additional Superintendent of Police Kumarachandra's daughter, here on Friday evening.

In a photograph that has gone viral, Jagadish and Kumarachandra are seen posing for the photograph without masks. Social media platforms slammed the two top officials of the district for this obvious folly.

The DC stays in Brahmagiri area, while Kumarachandra's official residence, where the ceremony was held, too is close by. Sources said that the DC arrived for the function around 8.40 pm and stayed for 10 minutes. When he went to wish the bride, as per the request of the photographer, the DC, Additional SP and others removed their masks and posed for the picture.

Social activist Prakash Malpe wondered how two top officials of the district could be so negligent, while people across the district were covering their faces and maintaining social distance. "Will Covid not spread at events organised by government officials," he put the poser, dripping with sarcasm.

Kumarachandra said, "We were just 15 members throughout the programme and the Deputy Commissioner came in for a few minutes to wish my daughter as we are neighbours. Covid-19 norms were followed."

Jagadish said masks were removed by them just to pose for a photograph.

**KAPPAN'S WIFE TO CJI**

Journalist Sidhique Kappan's wife Raihanath has approached the CJI, pleading to send her husband back to the Mathura Jail as interim relief

# Free Covid-19 vaccination for all residents, announces T'gana CM

The announcement comes when existing guidelines allow only those above 18 to get jab

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Hyderabad

CHIEF Minister K Chandrashekar Rao has decided to provide Covid-19 vaccination for free to around four crore residents in the State, including those from other states, irrespective of their age.

For this, the State government would be spending around ₹2,500 crore. Around 35 lakh people in the State have already been vaccinated. Though the existing guidelines allow only those aged above 18 to get vaccinated, the Chief Minister has decided to inoculate everyone, irrespective of the age. The reason behind this no-age-bar is said to be that Covid-19 vaccination for children, which is still in the initial stage of research, would be rolled out once approved in the near future. However, a clarity on the Chief Minister's statement will emerge only after he conducts the detailed review meeting on Covid-19 vacccination, expected to take place this week.

"We required ₹2,500 crore for free vaccination. But, people's lives are more important than money. That is why we have decided to give Covid-19 vaccine to all," the Chief Minister said.

Rao directed senior government officials to make arrangements for the same. The Chief Minister said that as Bharat Biotech is already producing Covid-19 vaccine and other companies like Dr Reddy's Laboratories have also come forward for the same, there would be no shortage of vaccines.

The Chief Minister, who is currently under home quarantine after he tested positive for Covid-19 on April 19, has decided to convene a high level meeting once he tested negative. "I will convene a meeting on Covid-19 vaccination in the next two to three days and monitor the vaccination programme personally," he said. He said that district-wise in-charges would be appointed for successful implementation of the vaccination programme. He said that the government was taking all measures to ensure there would be no shortage for medical oxygen and Remdesivir injections.

Rao appealed to the people not to be scared of Covid-19, but to follow the guidelines.

Curiously, while the Chief Minister's Office tweeted that everyone irrespective of age will be vaccinated for free, the Telangana Director of Public Health, Dr G Srinivasa Rao, tweeted, "Daring Decision from our Dynamic Chief Minister Sir.

Free Covid Vaccination to all of 18years above people in the state of #Telangana. Can be a potential Game Changer in our fight against the Covid Pandemic. Many Thanks from Health Department!"

> **We required ₹2,500 crore for free vaccination. But, people's lives are more important than money. That is why we have decided to give Covid-19 vaccine to all**
>
> Chandrashekar Rao, Chief Minister

Covid-19 testing being held in Kochi on Saturday. Kerala has increased testing for the virus in recent days | ALBIN MATHEW

### Convert available wards to treat Covid-19: T'gana

Hyderabad: Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar on Saturday directed officials concerned to convert all available wards into Covid-19 wards with oxygen-supported beds and ICU with ventilator facility to accommodate more patients in hospitals. Holding a video conference with District Collectors and medical officers, from the BRKR Bhavan on Saturday, the Chief Secretary said that all the infrastructure and human resources available in teaching hospitals should be utilised.

IN BENGALURU

# SET UP SIT TO PROBE CHILD TRAFFICKING: HC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka High Court said that the State Government will have to constitute the Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe child trafficking in the city, and take a stand on the recommendations made by the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority (KSLSA) in relation to 720 vulnerable children, who have been forced to sell things at traffic junctions and indulge in beggary in the city.

Directing the government to take action against unregistered child care institutes, including 56 such centres mentioned by KSLSA in its report submitted to the court, a division bench of Chief Justice Abhay Shreeniwas Oka and Justice Suraj Govindaraj said that after constitution of the SIT, the court is proposed to issue directions for detailed investigation.

The court was responding to a PIL filed by Letzkit Foundation, seeking directions to rehabilitate the children who are forced to sell things at traffic junctions and on streets in the city.

The court directed that the constitution of the SIT be considered in view of crimes registered in Basavanagudi, Chamarajpet and Vijayanagar police station limits, and the correspondence made by the member secretary of KSLSA with his counterpart in Bhopal in relation to child trafficking.

Noting that the data of vulnerable children, which was part of the report, affects the conscience of the court and it is an eye-opener for the protection child rights, the court stressed the need to revamp all institutions under the Juvenile Justice Act by providing the necessary infrastructure. The State Government and BBMP should file an affidavit on compliance of directions issued by the court and steps taken for the education of those vulnerable children, by May 27, 2021, it ordered.

According to the survey conducted between March 1 and 31, 2021, by KSLSA, 720 vulnerable children in the age group of 1-17 years were found at over 400 hotspots in the eight zones of Bengaluru City. They have been classified into six categories -- out of the 720 children, 52 indulged in begging, 219 were hawking, 337 children were required to work as child labour, family business or construction work, 9 as begging for being disabled, 76 infants were carried around by mothers and caretakers, either for begging or hawking. In the sixth category, it was found that a mafia was forcing 27 children into begging or hawking.

The KSLSA in its report stated that chances of a child-trafficking mafia being involved cannot be rule out, while no action has been taken though an incident was brought to the notice of DCP (Crime-1).

### KSLSA panel to oversee pandemic scene in B'luru

Meanwhile, the KSLSA has constituted a high-level committee headed by Justice A N Venugopala Gowda, former judge of the Karnataka High Court, to oversee the Covid-19 situation in the city.

Acting swiftly, the committee headed by Justice Gowda and member secretary of KSLSA, Shashidhar Shetty, on Saturday visited three hospitals, including Jayanagar Government Hospital and two private hospitals, in the city.

During the visit, the committee found the acute shortage of oxygen, Remdevisir and non-availability of beds. The Nodal Officers appointed by the BBMP were said to be unreachable and necessary instructions were given to the authorities concerned. The committee will hold frequent meetings to monitor the situation, sources said.

GET INOCULATED!

# Odisha AIIMS to halt OPD as more hospital staff infected

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bhubaneswar

DOCTORS, nurses and paramedics were the priority group among healthcare workers (HCWs) during the first phase of vaccination against Covid-19. However, with 22 per cent HCWs of AIIMS Bhubaneswar not having been administered a single dose and 39 per cent not having got the second dose, they are getting infected. Wary of rising cases among the HCWs and patients, the AIIMS authorities have announced shutdown of OPD services from Monday pending further notice.

According to a communication made to the Health and Family Welfare department, of the 4,447 HCWs in AIIMS-BBSR, 3,457 had taken the first dose and 2,719 had got both the doses of Covaxin till April 17. Although officials did not divulge the number of HCWs who are now down with Covid-19, sources said many of them had not taken the vaccine.

AIIMS Director Dr Gitanjali Batmanabane said, "We can motivate but not force any one. Some women HCWs could not take the jab because they were either pregnant or lactating."

# New restrictions in Tamil Nadu has malls, gyms, places of worship shut

NIRUPAMA VISWANATHAN
@ Chennai

AS Tamil Nadu reported a fresh spike of 14,842 cases and a death toll of 80 on Saturday, the State government reset the lockdown button to tackle the onslaught by announcing a fresh set of restrictions from Monday.

According to the new guidelines, apart from continuing with the ongoing night curfew and Sunday lockdown, malls, large standalone shops and shopping complexes will remain closed on all weekdays. Other enclosed spaces like theatres, gyms, bars, recreation clubs, auditoriums and conference halls will be shut. There is no clarity on the functioning of TASMAC stores outside malls. As May 2 is a Sunday, and comes under the lockdown guideline, the government will make that day an exception and issue a detailed safety guideline for vote counting in a few days.

To avoid panic buying and prevent shopping clusters, the government has permitted standalone grocery stores and vegetable shops (except those in malls) to function, as also departmental stores without air-conditioning and with 50 per cent of their customer capacity. While restaurants, messes and tea shops will be allowed to offer takeaway services, guests in hotels and lodges will have to be served food in their respective rooms. But beauty parlours, spas and salons in all corporations and municipalities will have to be shut.

Further, while e-commerce sites will function with restrictions, the Information Technology (IT) sector will continue to function with at least 50 per cent of staff working from home, the statement read.

Weddings and related events may be conducted with a maximum of 50 people, while the limit for funerals is 25 people. Sports training academies will be shut to the public, although practice for national and international events may continue. The public will not be allowed at places of worship, but the staff may conduct daily rituals.

People entering the State from abroad and all places other than Puducherry will have to register on http://eregister.tnega.org.

Buses will continue to be operated with all passengers remaining seated, while taxis may be run with three passengers, and autorickshaws with two.

# 4 arrested for trying to sell Remdesivir in black

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

CONTINUING the drive against black-marketing of the Remdesivir drug, Central Crime Branch sleuths on Friday arrested four more suspects, and have seized 55 vials so far. Until now, officials have arrested a total of 16 suspects in connection with this case, including two medical representatives, with all of them being accused of selling the drug at prices in upwards of Rs 10,000 per vial.

The arrested are Hujefa (29), Martin (32) and Prakash (37) -- all staffers at medical stores, and K P Suman Karthikeya (35), a medical distributor.

A senior police officer said that five days ago, three persons were arrested for involvement in similar crimes, and they revealed the names of their associates who are involved in the distribution of pharma products.

Based on a tipoff, a special team searched their firms on Commercial Street and arrested the suspects. Some of their associates, meanwhile, managed to escape and efforts are on to nab them.

It may be recalled that three suspects, Rajesh, Shakeeb and Sohail, who were running a pharmacy named Gurushree Medicals in Suddaguntepalya, were arrested by the Central Crime Branch for illegal stocking of Remdevisir.

They were selling the Remdesivir drug at Rs 10,500 a vial, which is much higher than its original MRP. Eleven injection bottles were recovered during the probe.

# Covid patient commits suicide in hospital ward

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

A 61-year-old Covid patient allegedly took his own life in the ward of a private hospital near Vijayanagar Metro station, where he was admitted. The deceased has been identified as Ramanna, a resident of Anjananagar on Magadi Road.

A senior police officer said that the incident came to light around midnight, when hospital staff went to check on him. They found him hanging, and alerted Vijaynagar police.

His son also made a statement before the police that Ramanna was in depression due to Covid, and was under treatment in the hospital since two days.

He left no suicide note, and the exact reason which led him to take the extreme step is yet to be ascertained, police added.

# Two killed, several injured in Thrissur Pooram accident

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Thrissur

TWO people were killed and several others injured when a big branch of a banyan tree fell on devotees and percussionists participating in a panchavadyam performance of Thiruvambady group's 'Madhathil Varavu' procession held as part of the Thrissur Pooram on Friday midnight. Thiruvambady devaswom committee members Irikkalil Ramesh, 56, and Paniyathuveettil Radhakrishnan, 65, are the deceased. The health condition of one person, who is admitted to the Government Medical College Hospital here, remains critical.

Many people who got trapped under the branch were rescued by Fire and Rescue personnel. It took time for the ambulance to reach the spot, according to witnesses. Power cables too got snapped, delaying the rescue operation. "Everything happened in a flash," said district Congress committee general secretary Ravi Jose Thanickal, who was with the Thiruvambady group during the incident.

Some of the percussionists too had their legs and arms fractured.

FESTIVE PULL

Police personnel pulling Rukuna Rath during Bahuda Yatra (return journey of deities) in Bhubaneswar on Saturday | IRFANA

# Farmers forced to destroy their crops

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

TOMATOES, that were being sold at an average of ₹15 per kg for the past couple of months, has suddenly crashed to ₹4 per kg in the market. Consequently, farmers are not even getting ₹2 per kg and are resorting to destroying the crop as they cannot even pay wages to labourers employed for harvesting.

Mahesh, a farmer who had grown bumper crop in seven acres near Siddaiahnapura Cross in Chamarajanagar district, has now assigned 15 labourers to destroy the standing crop. He says they have suffered losses of more than ₹15 lakh as there is no demand for tomatoes. "I would have been got back my investment even if I had got at least ₹5 per kg. How can we sustain if traders are not ready to buy even at ₹2 per kg?" he asked.

"It is heartwrenching to pull out plants that are bearing over 15 kg of ripe tomatoes. Since there is no demand or good prices, we just do want the landlord asks us to," rued Mangamma, a labourer from Haradanahalli.

"I had no other option but to sell tomatoes for ₹2 per kg as we have spent more than ₹2 lakh to cultivate the crop on two acres," said Rachappa. Many other farmers have left the produce unharvested in the fields, hoping that it can be used manure.

The almost 60 per cent dip in the number of vegetable trucks from neighbouring Tamil Nadu and Kerala has only rubbed salt into the wounds of farmers.

Federation of State Farmers Organisations president Kurboor Shanthakumar said that the government failed to take experts' suggestions seriously and make preparations to counter the second wave and has put people and farmers into trouble.

ROUGH JOURNEY

# *Out of hospital without oxygen, woman heads to Chennai in ICU ambulance*

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

BHAVIKA Mayuri (name changed) who was asked to leave Specialist Hospital here in the city on Friday after the hospital ran out of medical oxygen, on Saturday boarded an ICU ambulance which was to take her to a hospital in Chennai.

A number of other less severe patients left the hospital on Friday, but Bhavika managed to remain there till Saturday, until arrangements were made for her travel.

Her efforts to contact police to ensure the hospital did not forcibly evict her, had yielded no results because the hospital reportedly told her outright there was no more oxygen left.

This is the situation in many other hospitals in Bengaluru. Bhavika had checked with other hospitals in the city, but was told that they either had no beds or oxygen, or would soon run out of oxygen supply.

A traumatised Bhavika told *The New Sunday Express* that if she does not get oxygen, it could be fatal for her, considering the lung damage she had suffered due to Covid-19. She said she might need oxygen for another two weeks, as advised by her pulmonologist.

> **If I do not get oxygen, it could be fatal for me, considering the lung damage I have suffered due to Covid-19. I might need oxygen for another two weeks**
>
> Bhavika Mayuri

Luckily, Bhavika managed to get a bed in a Chennai hospital with the help of her father, a retired diplomat. She also got an ICU ambulance to see her through the six-hour journey to Chennai, and will need about 2-3 litres of oxygen to sustain her journey.

Recalling her brush with death, Bhavika says she had to wait for six hours before she was admitted on April 7, and her oxygen saturation level had dropped to 67.

Getting each of the nine vials of Remdesivir was an ordeal, and entailed a number of phone calls and much anxiety.

Bhavika said that each vial came from a different place, including Coimbatore and Madurai. She recalled in horror how she had watched and heard from hospital staff, during her two-week stay, of many people dying without oxygen or an ICU bed.

Bhavika was working in Bengaluru with an multinational company, and lived alone.

But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself

Rachel Carson

# BREATHLESS IN INDIA: THE PRICE OF INACTION

THE THIRD EYE

**SHANKKAR AIYAR**
Author of The Gated Republic, Aadhaar: A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit Revolution, and Accidental India
shankkar.aiyar@gmail.com

ON May 20, 2020 the Ministry of Health issued a press statement. It said, "15 countries with highest number of Covid-19 cases, with almost same (*sic*: cumulative) population as India, have reported 34 times cases and 83 times deaths." Less than 60 days later India touched a million Covid-19 cases.

On February 21, 2021 the BJP National Executive applauded the government's management of the pandemic. It said, "Not only did India keep running a successful fight against Covid, but it set an example in front of the world for what work can be done during Covid." On Friday, two months later, India recorded its highest ever tally of 3, 46,786 cases and 2624 deaths — that is, 240 cases a minute and over 100 deaths an hour.

India finds itself caught in the wake of exceptionalism and premature triumphalism. Arguably the political applause was prompted by the dip in caseload and the rise of recoveries. Equally it is clear that experts, those tasked with public safety, were blinded by hubris and chose to read from the popular hymn sheet. The fact is countries like the UK, Germany, the US and those who opened economic engagement saw a second and even a third wave. India too had opened up its economy, a new variant B 1617 was out. Ergo the wave was inevitable. Indeed the graph shows India's case load had begun rising from February 9.

The parade of pathos is unrelenting. India is paying the price of inaction. The images beamed across living rooms reflect the stark reality of thousands left breathless. Courts are taking suo motu cognisance of state failures. Social media has become the Covid helpline as individuals and institutions plead for help. Twitter is clogged –a Jaipur hospital with 200 patients declared "Oxygen supply to last only an hour now", another declared discharge of patients while others petitioned for police protection.

There has been a blitzkrieg of criticism of the Centre's handling of the crisis. This column in previous weeks has commented on the 'Politics of Not Leading by Example' and the 'Epidemic of Wilful Blindness'. There has been course correction — for instance on efforts to bring drug and oxygen supplies on board. However, there is no disputing the systemic sloth afflicting governance. The March 2021 report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee examines a litany of issues. One factoid is illustrative. The Department of Health Research deals with epidemics and outbreaks. Of the 42 sanctioned posts 24 are vacant.

Success in public policy calls for planning and execution. On Saturday, nearly eight weeks into the second wave, the government called on start-ups for details on oxygen concentrators and sought details from government hospitals in urban metros to set up extension hospitals. Must good ideas for scaling capacity wait for the eleventh hour of a crisis? Indeed, many of the issues popping up are inexplicable — for instance the import duty amidst a pandemic for the much sought after Remedisivir and its raw inputs (which was waived off this week) or the 12 per cent GST imposed on medical-grade oxygen.

The Union government has much to explain but that cannot be an alibi for ineffectual record of state governments. The aggravating factor in the magnitude of the surge of the second wave has much to do with the failure of state governments in getting their act together. Almost every state witnessing the haplessness of people screaming for oxygen experienced the oxygen scarcity last year too and should have had a plan B for the 'if and when' contingency. Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh which went through oxygen shortages in the previous wave were just as unprepared this time. In fact the Centre's initiative to expand oxygen capacity with grants is pending in most states.

It has been argued by some that the second wave was catalysed by 'poor management' of infection and transmission by Maharashtra. Be that as it may, did other states leap to action? Given the transmission risks, other states should have tightened protocols for residents and visitors as early as in February. The irony is that those visiting Maharashtra were required to present RT-PCR clearance but those travelling from Maharashtra to other states were not obliged to do so.

It was always going to be a challenge for India to combat the pandemic — notwithstanding its younger demographics. My book, The Gated Republic, chronicles the history of seven decades of failed promises and continuing apathy. Many of the issues afflicting public health highlighted by India's first health survey, catalysed by none other than Florence Nightingale, are yet to be addressed. India's beds per 1,000 ratio places it in the company of Benin and Uganda. The country has barely 12.89 lakh allopathic doctors for a population of 139 crore – Uttar Pradesh, expected to touch over one lakh daily cases by the end of April, has 89,286 doctors for 22 crore people.

India's quest for immunity is at the intersection of rising infections and accelerated vaccination. The economy scarred badly last year yet again faces downside risks and rating agencies are indicating a downgrade of GDP forecast. A $ 2.8 trillion economy can scarcely afford the crisis it faces and quibble about funding vaccinations. There will always be a cost to doing things and indisputably a price to pay for inaction.

# WHAT IS THE ISSUE, COVID OR DEMOCRACY?

POINT OF VIEW

**T J S GEORGE**

LET us face it, Corona has swept across India in ways that point to a failure of leadership. Shameful details that highlight this keep surfacing one after another. Hospitals have been running out of oxygen, but India exported more than 9,000 metric tonnes of oxygen during the first three quarters of the just concluded financial year. Who is responsible for this idiotic situation? Bodies have been stacking up in morgues and crematoriums but central and state governments hide the numbers. The system has collapsed primarily because, as the President of the Public Health Foundation put it, "leadership did not adequately convey that this was an epidemic which had not gone away."

Leadership was busy otherwise. On the day a record-breaking 2,34,000 new Corona cases were registered along with 1,341 deaths, the Prime Minister was busy addressing a political rally in Bengal, noticing with satisfaction that he had "never seen such huge crowds". The Home Minister of the country has been hanging around Bengal, ridiculing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and making new ground-level arrangements for his party to capture the state. He held a roadshow, the crowds defying the pandemic.

It is in times of emergency that people recognise the greatness, or smallness, of their leaders. Winston Churchill was a petty-minded racist, but when the World War challenged his country, he rose to great heights as the leader of Britain. He did so, as Mao Zedong did in China and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, by thinking only about his country and its people, never about himself.

In India, the Prime Minister's keenness to see his personal stamp on all moves in and by India is an acknowledged fact. All policy initiatives are Modi initiatives, not Indian initiatives. This approach was taken to the extent of vaccination certificates. Civilised countries never project parties and party leaders in such national endeavours. In the US, for example, a syndicated photograph of the Speaker of House of Representatives is put out on the official logo of the Centre for Disease Control. Britain and Israel have similar practices. In India, vaccination certificates carried the Prime Minister's photo even when it was in violation of the Model Code of Conduct. Many political parties protested. The Health Ministry came out with the explanation that filters were applied to ensure that the Modi photo did not appear on vaccination certificates "in pull-bound states". Who is trying to fool whom?

What we have is an "unstoppable Prime Minister" who has an I-am-the-state approach to governance. He will go his way whatever happens. There is a song titled 'Unstoppable' made famous by Australian singer Sia Kate. The lyrics go like this: I know what it takes to fool this town/I am unstoppable/I am a Porsche with no brakes/I am invincible/Yeah, I win every single game/I am so powerful/I don't need batteries to play.

> The price of greatness is responsibility, they say. Responsible leaders of nations usually have arrangements to anticipate developing crises and make advance preparations to meet them. In our country, crisis often takes us by surprise and then we see the authorities struggling to cope. When they fail, they blame others

We have a system where those who run on batteries last the longest and go the farthest. Consider the country's Health Minister. The honourable Dr Harsh Vardhan recently tweeted lines that were notable for their abjectness and eagerness to win favours. "Hail visionary leadership of Hon'ble PM Shree Narendra Modi *Ji* and prudence of Finance Minister for taking us closer to 'Health for All'." Does a cabinet minister have to openly hail the head of the cabinet and that too in words so obviously meant to curry-favour? The answer is Yes, if we are talking about the Indian cabinet where the head needs frequent reaffirmations of his leadership qualities.

The price of greatness is responsibility, they say. Responsible leaders of nations usually have arrangements to anticipate developing crises and make advance preparations to meet them. In our country, crisis often takes us by surprise and then we see the authorities struggling to cope. When they fail, they blame others. When the Covid crisis developed unexpectedly, India made an attempt to position itself as an alternative to China in vaccine production. It found that China had an organisationally strong set up that could not be challenged easily. Within weeks, India changed from being an exporter of vaccine to an importer.

But then China's interest is confined to making President Xi Jinping the undisputed centre of power; popularity is not a factor. India is a democracy and democracy has deep-rooted problems: Like the need for a leader to be liked by the people, a big nuisance. Minister of State Rao Inderjit Singh was right when he said last week that democracy was a handicap. Shall we say, Down with the Constitution, Down with Parliament?

# INTERNAL POLITICS & EXTERNAL POLICIES

OPINION

**N SATHIYA MOORTHY**
Distinguished Fellow & Head-Chennai Initiative
Observer Research Foundation

IN the midst of campaigning for BJP in the ongoing Assembly elections in West Bengal, Union Home Minister Amit Shah reportedly stoked sentiments in neighbouring Bangladesh. In a media interview in the midst of the poll campaign, Shah said that "poor people from Bangladesh are entering India even now as they do not get enough to eat in their own country". This is believed to have embarrassed the India-friendly government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen was quick to react — as it could not have been otherwise, in the domestic political environment. He sought to downplay the episode by claiming that Shah had only a 'limited knowledge' of his country. This may have discouraged Shah from referring to Bangladesh by name, again. But there were no marks for guessing when he still continues to harp on TMC Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee relying on 'illegal migrants' to win the ongoing election battle.

Contextualisation requires recalling Dhaka's cancellation of Minister Momen's Delhi visit at the height of the 'CAA protests' across India, with Shah's ministry and his utterances in focus. Coming as it did, not long after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation as the chief guest in the golden jubilee celebrations of 'Bangladesh Liberation', Shah's latest comments seem to have brought new pressures on Hasina's ruling Awami League when no great domestic political concerns exist for her government.

**India-focussed:** Bangladesh is not the only neighbourhood nation where India-relations is a major issue in domestic politics and periodic elections. The importance of India in these nations derives not from the prevailing context of bilateral ties but more in the immediate relevance to other election issues.

Among neighbours, Sri Lanka is the only country where India is not an election issue. Instead, it is a pertinent and near-permanent political issue of all times. On the reverse, there is a perception that Sri Lanka is a politico-electoral issue in Tamil Nadu, influencing governments in Delhi. This construct continues to remain even though Sri Lanka has never ever been an election issue in Tamil Nadu, though it is a live political issue for decades.

India is also a politico-election issue in the Himalayan nation of Nepal, even before it became a Republic, and in Bhutan after it embraced constitutional democracy. In both cases, some inexplicable and indefensible decisions of the Indian government have strained relations, down to the voter-level. Subsequent damage-control efforts have worked, but only so much.

> More the 21st century Indians propagate the greatness of ancient India, greater are the chances of the world recalling India's very own 'unity in diversity' and its acceptance as the 'moral power-house' of the times. This image does not jell with their perception of India as an 'emerging super-power' in the present-day context

Anyway, memories of the Indian decision to blockade movement of goods to Nepal twice in four decades, and cutting down petroleum- product supplies to Bhutan, not very long ago, lingers in the minds of every citizen in the two countries. India-friendly regimes, parties and leaders have suffered. This has impacted bilateral relations and other aspects of India's foreign and security policy negatively, with the present generation inspiring their future generations.

Then, there is the tiny archipelagonation Maldives, where, unlike the common Sri Lankan ocean-neighbour, India remains as much an election issue as it is a political issue. It's 'hyper-nationalism' in Maldives which prides itself as the only one in South Asia that was not colonised by a European power. In Maldives today, 'hyper-nationalism' sustains itself as a socio-political concern and more so as an eternal poll issue.

**Pakistan's plight:** There is a lesson in this for all nations, starting with India. There is even more for them all to learn from the other South Asian nation, Pakistan. Since Partition and Independence, Pakistan has made India the *raison d'etre* for its existence – and by extension, its continuance as a nation-state. To cut the long story short, no political party, leadership or military establishment can afford to find permanent solutions to problems with India, as they view it as the beginning of the end of the 'Idea of Pakistan'.

There are lessons that India needs to learn from Pakistan, but in the larger neighbourhood context, too. More the 21st century Indians, both locals and NRIs, propagate the greatness of ancient India, greater are the chances of the world recalling India's very own 'unity in diversity' and its acceptance as the 'moral power-house' of the times. This image does not jell with their perception of India as an 'emerging super-power' in the present-day context, as it never ever was one, or aspired to be one.

India will do better if it re-packaged itself for what it has been, and not what it ought to have been. This is one aspect of ancient India that can be packaged for the Neighbourhood, but without hard-selling 'cultural similarities' and the like. If the other side is grateful to India for their own past, we should be graceful about it.

Externalising internal politics, and internalising external policies can prove dangerous for India as only Pakistan has taught us. We need to learn this lesson quick and fast. Amit Shah's references to Bangladesh, whether that country is named or not, has to be read and understood in this context.

*sathiyam54@nsathiyamoorthy.com*

**QUOTE CORNER**

We are at the verge of the abyss. We must ensure the next step is in the right direction. It's time to mobilise political leadership, move ahead together – to overcome climate change, end our war on nature & build lives of dignity & prosperity for all

**António Guterres,** UN Secretary General

There's no time to waste when it comes to the existential threat of climate change. That's why I've set a bold new goal of cutting the US greenhouse gas emissions at least in half by 2030.

**Joe Biden,** US President

If we want to succeed in the climate challenge, we must step up on the protection of biodiversity. The fight is the same. We took action at #OnePlanetSummit in January. The appointments are fixed. We need to.

**Emmanuel Macron,** French President

**MAILBAG** WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com

### Campaigns should go digital

The recent spike in Covid-19 cases has put the common people's lives in danger. Considering the current surge and ongoing election exercise, the Election Commission of India should now impose a model code of conduct to bring Covid-19 under its purview, while considering the people's health and safety as paramount factors. The ECI should immediately revoke all the election campaign permissions in the physical mode for the remaining phases and instead focus on innovative election campaigns including conducting rallies through a video conferencing mode. No political party should be allowed to gather crowds but instead use technology as a mode to appeal to voters and ensure a smooth election campaigning process.

Varun Dambal, Bangalore

### Good sense on climate action

It appears that good sense prevailed upon the nationalistic world leaders as they have at least formally conducted a virtual meeting on the inimical effects of climate changes. Now it is time to implement the required measures on war-footing. Time and again the esteemed authorities of scientists as well the civil society groups have been urging the world leaders to focus on and take up immediate measures to prevent the ever-deteriorating nature like tipping glaciers, devastating wild fires, catastrophic floods, etc. all around the globe. It might sound rhetoric, but we have lost all the chances and if the authorities fail to act decisively by cutting on specified emissions of noxious gases and transiting to clean energies, the dooms day might not be further.

A M Chakravarty, Hyderabad

### People of few responsibilities

This has reference to the article "Pandemic and the indisciplined Indian" which is spot on and insightful. Truths are bitter and the author narrated how we Indian citizens have a long way to go to improve our economy and social discipline. The collection of over `2 crore by the police department in Tamil Nadu from people for not wearing masks speaks about how people have been violating the rules. A society claiming more rights and performing less responsibilities is far away from prosperity and progression. Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "If we discharge all our duties, rights will not be far to seek". The writer's observations are not self-loathing but self-assessment only.

R Sridharan, Chennai

### No time to play politics

This refers the news report, "25 deaths in 24 hours in Sir Ganga Ram hospital". India's plight is worsening day by the day and the fatalities on account of lack of oxygen supply have become a commonplace in several states. Staff at hospitals and crematoriums are under tremendous pressure. The authorities ought to work in synergy to surmount the pandemic. The central government and states need to set aside their differences rather than playing politics.

Aanya Singhal, Noida

### Avoidable tragedy unfolding

The spread of Covid infection could have been avoided considerably if the citizens followed the protocol religiously by wearing masks properly and keeping social distancing. The elections in many states made the situation worse. Super-added to that was the Kumbh Mela. The Tablighi attendees and the Kumbh pilgrims equally violated the law, but the reaction of the government towards them were different. No Nation develops sans discipline.

Dr M Haneef, Kottayam

### Recurring fire a big concern

This has reference to the news '13 Covid patients die in Maharashtra Hospital blaze". Such incidents have become a regular occurrence in Mumbai. Last year alone around 15 fire accidents took place in Mumbai. The main cause of fire in almost every incident is short circuit. Officials should regularly make fire safety audits. This will instill a moral fear to adhere to safety protocols.

S Arjun Prasanna, Bengaluru

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**TWEETS OF THE DAY**

**Rahul Gandhi** @RahulGandhi
Appeal to the Centre to focus on vaccines, oxygen and other services instead of spending unnecessary projects

**Mahua Moitra** @MahuaMoitra
Perhaps SC should stop worrying about who's getting a farewell & focus on those who can't even get a funeral

**Shashi Tharoor** @ShashiTharoor
Every truly patriotic Indian stands with journalists who are risking their lives to bring the nation the truth about our present crisis

**COVID TALLY**

**FATALITIES IN LAST 24 HOURS**

**2,624**

**FRESH CASUALTIES**

| | |
|---|---|
| MAHARASHTRA | 773 |
| DELHI | 348 |
| CHHATTISGARH | 219 |
| UTTAR PRADESH | 196 |
| GUJARAT | 142 |
| KARNATAKA | 190 |
| TAMIL NADU | 78 |
| PUNJAB | 75 |

**NATIONAL FATALITY RATE**

1.14%

**TOTAL DEATHS SO FAR**

1,89,544

83.49%

**NATIONAL RECOVERY RATE**

**VACCINE DOSES**

**CASES IN LAST 24 HRS**

3,46,786

**ACTIVE CASES IN THE COUNTRY**

25,52,940

74.15%

**10 STATES REPORTED 74.15% OF THE NEW CASES :** Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan

12

**STATES DISPLAYING AN UPWARD TRAJECTORY IN DAILY CASES:** Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal

66.66%

Of total number of cases are in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Kerala

Prayagraj during lockdown | PTI

### *Biological E gets nod*

Biological E. Limited on Saturday announced that it has successfully completed Phase I/II clinical trials of its COVID subunit vaccine candidate in India and received the approval to start the Phase III clinical trial from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization - Subject Expert Committee (SEC).

# 20 die gasping for breath at Delhi hospital

These critically ill Covid patients were totally dependent on high-flow medical oxygen, authorities brace for worse

**SIDDHANTA MISHRA & PARVEZ SULTAN** @ New Delhi

AMID the tremendous shortage of medical oxygen in the national capital, catastrophe struck at a private hospital, taking 20 lives on Saturday.

At least 20 Covid patients were left without oxygen at Jaipur Golden Hospital, which caused their death in the wee hours. Totally dependent on high-flow medical oxygen, these critically ill patients were undergoing treatment at the hospital, which has moved court demanding oxygen.

"The loss of lives happened because our oxygen was late by seven hours. We needed good pressure which could not be maintained. This worsened the situation," DK Baluja, MD of Jaipur Golden Hospital, told this newspaper on Saturday.

The director said the crisis is far from over, as despite several SOS calls, they have just four hours of oxygen left at the hospital. The situation could again take a turn for the worse if something is not done immediately. In Delhi, which saw the death of 25 patients at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital a day earlier, the clamour for oxygen from hospitals was heard throughout the day. Some said they are left with stock only for a few hours. Scores of patients are admitted in different hospitals.

Many helpless hospital administrations are advising patients to relocate or make arrangements for the gas on their own. Shortage was reported from Moolchand Hospital, Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, Saroj Hospital, Mata Chanan Devi Hospital, Batra Hospital, Maharaja Agrasen Hospital and several nursing homes.

Batra Hospital, which approached the Delhi High Court, said it needs 8,000 litres of oxygen, adding that it manage with 6,000 litres. The hospital said it was given only 500 litres this morning. "We can't manage," the hospital told the court.

The court in its order said: "We are not in the position to direct (supply of oxygen to particular hospitals). We are trying to do what we can. It's not that Delhi government has oxygen. We are also concerned about the lives."

Relative of a patient at Delhi's Jaipur Golden Hospital, where at least 20 Covid-19 patients died on Saturday | PTI

Air lifting of empty cryogenic oxygen containers is underway in New Delhi | PTI

# Centre asks states to prepare field hospitals for mass vaccination drive

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** @ New Delhi

DAYS before the Covid-19 vaccination drive undergoes a major expansion in the country and opens for all adults, the Centre on Saturday asked states to consider setting up field hospitals with help from government research agencies or private sector facilities where the shots can be administered.

States can take help from agencies such as the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and similar agencies in the private sector to build field hospitals, the government said.

Releasing a strategy guide to take the country's vaccination drive to a new phase, Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan and R S Sharma assured the states that the CoWin platform is equipped to handle the complexities of the new phase of vaccination starting next month.

The Centre, meanwhile, also clarified that only online registration facilities will be available for those in the 18–44-year age group.

As per the new vaccination policy, this age group can take jabs at vaccination centres run by state governments or at private hospitals offering the service. The states, therefore, have now been asked to register additional private Covid vaccination centres in mission mode by engaging with private hospitals, hospitals of industrial establishments, industry Associations, among others.

The Centre also directed states to monitor the number of hospitals that have procured vaccines and have declared stocks and prices on CoWin and schedule vaccination for the eligible population for providing adequate visibility of vaccination slots on the platform. Also, they have been asked to prioritise decisions regarding direct procurement of vaccines and train vaccination centre staff about vaccination, reporting on adverse events following immunisation and management.

# Hospitals of defence PSUs to treat civilians

**MAYANK SINGH** @ New Delhi

ALL health facilities of defence public sector undertakings and Ordnance Factory Board have been allowed to provide health services to civilians infected with the coronavirus.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh made the announcement after reviewing the efforts being made by the Armed Forces in contributing to India's fight against the second wave of Covid-19. He directed the Armed Forces and various other establishments of MoD to extend all possible assistance to the civilian administration. DRDO Chairman Dr G Sathish Reddy briefed that another 250 beds will be added by Saturday evening at its Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Covid Hospital in Delhi. The addition will take the total number of beds at the facility to 500.

A 1,000-bed hospital has become operational in Gujarat. Another treatment facility in Lucknow would become operational in the next five-six days. It would be run by the Armed Forces Medical Services in coordination with the UP government.

# MAHA IN EARLY STAGE OF FLATTENING CURVE

**SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI** @ Mumbai

THE last 10-day record of daily Covid cases, deaths and discharges in Maharashtra indicates an early stage of flattening of the graph, and that there might be a significant decline in positive cases in the second week of May. According to the health department data, the state has this month reported the highest positive case figure of nearly 70,000. In Mumbai, the figure is 9,000 cases.

"There is no major surge in positive cases. The recovery rate is steady as more and more people are getting discharged than being admitted. It shows that we are at an early stage of flattening of the plateau with a decline in positive cases," Pradeep Awate, joint health director of Maharashtra government told this newspaper on Saturday.

# Punjab shuts steel industries to divert $O_2$

**HARPREET BAJWA** @ Chandigarh

WITH many hospitals reporting a shortage of oxygen amid spiralling Covid-19 cases, the Punjab government on Saturday ordered the closure of operations at the state's iron and steel industry to divert oxygen for medical use.

Oxygen along with LPG is used in induction, arc furnaces and rolling mills to cut and shape the iron and steel items to be used by different industry verticals. Iron and steel units are mostly concentrated in Ludhiana and Mandi Gobindgarh.

Punjab CM Amarinder Singh also ordered immediate establishment of oxygen control rooms at the state and district-level. Ordering closure of industrial operations at iron and steel plants, said the CM in a statement, adding that the state government will convey its decision to the Centre.

The move has come hours after six patients died at a private hospital in Amritsar due to oxygen shortage.

Taking stock of the situation, the CM said the current allocation of oxygen to Punjab is not sufficient to meet its needs and said he has already taken up the matter with the Centre, seeking an increase in quota on an urgent basis.

Sudden influx of patients from neighbouring states has put an added burden on the oxygen requirements of Punjab, the CM noted.

The CM also asked for a feasibility report from the Power Department on the use of thermal plants for providing oxygen for medical use. Punjab has witnessed a sharp increase in demand for oxygen over the past a few days. The demand for oxygen currently stands at 250 metric tonnes per day and is further expected to go up to 300 MT in coming days on account of spiralling Covid cases.

A Covid patient gets free oxygen by a Sikh organisation in Ghaziabad | SHEKHAR YADAV

### *Six die due to oxygen shortage*

Chandigarh: Six patients died at a private hospital in Amritsar on Saturday allegedly due to a shortage of oxygen, prompting Punjab authorities to order a probe into the incident. Five of the six patients were infected with COVID-19, the hospital said. "Despite the district administration being repeatedly asked to extend help, no one turned up to do the needful," Sunil Devgan, the chairman and managing director of Neelkant hospital where the deaths occurred, alleged. "Six patients, including two women, died due to the shortage of oxygen," he claimed. However, Medical Education Minister O P Soni refuted the charge and claimed that no proper information was given by the hospital about any shortage of oxygen. "A mere simple message was dropped in a WhatsApp group to the administration," he said.

**Oxygen Expresses have delivered nearly 150 tonnes of Oxygen in last 24 hrs, with more trains in the pipeline** - Piyush Goyal, railways minister

**Bihar is not getting the requisite cooperation from the Center; the allocation of oxygen vaccine is also being discriminated against. Why this step-motherly treatment?** -Tejashwi Yadav, RJD

**Oxygen is available in air and can be harvested everywhere. In Modi regime even that is in short supply leading to loss of precious lives. Who is responsible for these deaths?** -Yashwant Sinha, TMC

**7,999**

**FRESH CASES REPORTED IN NAGPUR, HIGHEST SINGLE-DAY SPIKE SO FAR**

**ON THE WHEELS**

# *Autowallah turns messiah for corona patients*

**MUKESH RANJAN** @ Ranchi

WITH Covid cases surging in Jharkhand, patients are facing issues like non-availability of ambulances or being overcharged for ferrying patients to hospitals. However, an auto driver in Ranchi is providing free rides to corona patients. 21-year-old Ravi Agrawal, who is also pursuing B. Com from the Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav College in Ranchi, has also put his number on social media asking people to call in case of any medical emergency.

According to Ravi, on April 15, he saw an old woman begging taxi and auto drivers to take her to the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), but everyone turned her down suspecting her to be a Covid-19 patient.

"I took her to RIMS. She offered me ₹200 but I refused to take it due to some unknown reasons," said Ravi. Doing something good for someone for the first time gave him immense satisfaction, he added.

"After that incident, I decided to provide free service for corona patients and posted my phone number on social media. I have been getting several calls," said Ravi. So far, he has served over 20 corona patients.

As the only earning member of the family, which includes his parents and a brother, Ravi also works as a newspaper vendor and bottled water supplier. People, who have availed of Ravi's free services, are thankful. "He is like a god to us. He took me to the hospital when the ambulance operators were not ready for it, and those who were ready, were charging like anything," said Hawaldar Singh, a resident of Kokar in Ranchi. Ravi follows the protocol advised by the government and sanitises the auto after dropping each patient at the hospital.

Ravi Agrawal has served more than 20 coronavirus patients | EXPRESS

### *Free oxygen beds in Jharkhand*

In a move to make oxygen facility available to the people, Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Saturday virtually inaugurated Covid circuits for Ranchi and Jamshedpur divisions. Under this arrangement, oxygen beds will be ensured for the seriously infected Covid patients free of cost at the nearest district just be dialing 104. "We have started a new arrangement in Ranchi and Jamshedpur divisions of Jharkhand and named it as Covid circuit, under which, oxygen beds will be made available to Covid patients at the nearest district hospital free of cost if it is not available in that particular district in which he is residing," said Soren.

### *MP requests rlys to deploy coaches*

The Madhya Pradesh government has requested the railways to deploy 20 COVID care coaches each at Bhopal and Habibganj railway stations of West Central Railway division, the national transporter said on Saturday. These coaches will be handed over to the state government from April 25, it said. A total of 5,601 train coaches have been converted to COVID care centers by railways to augment the efforts of the central government in the fight against coronavirus. At present, 3,816 coaches are available for use as COVID care coaches.

**DEBATE**

# It's not fair to compare vax's global prices with India: SII

CONTINUED FROM P1

THE Centre had recently announced that all above 18 years of age would be eligible for vaccination under its new inoculation policy, beginning May 1. The new policy decentralises procurement, meaning the Centre would buy 50% of required vaccines at ₹150 per dose, with the rest being procured and paid for by the states. The Centre-procured doses would be supplied to states for free.

SII, whose Covishield accounts for 90% of the doses administered in India so far, had said it would charge ₹400 per dose from the governments and ₹600 from private hospitals. Facing criticism for its new pricing announcement, SII said on Saturday it was "inaccurate comparisons between the global prices of the vaccine with India", and said Covishield remained "the most affordable Covid-19 vaccine available in the market today".

"Only a limited portion of SII's volume will be sold to private hospitals at ₹600 per dose. The price of the vaccine is still lower than a lot of other medical treatment and essentials required to treat Covid-19 and other life-threatening diseases," the SII said in its statement.

The company also said that while the current situation is "dire; the virus is constantly mutating while the public remains at risk... we have to ensure sustainability as we must be able to invest in scaling up and expanding our capacity to fight the pandemic and save lives".

**INTEGRATED LOGISTICS**

India needs to have a national logistics network, combining the civilian and military resources, to effectively deal with any crisis situation, Vice Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General CP Mohanty said

1 ARRESTED IN U.P. OVER THE RAPE OF 16-YEAR-OLD GIRL

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ahmedabad | 41 | 25 | Mumbai | 34 | 28 |
| Bhopal | 38 | 21 | Panaji | 34 | 27 |
| Jaipur | 37 | 22 | Patna | 38 | 22 |
| Amritsar | 34 | 15 | Lucknow | 37 | 22 |
| Chennai | 34 | 27 | Port Blair | 32 | 25 |
| Kolkata | 38 | 27 | Imphal | 33 | 19 |
| Srinagar | 20 | 7 | Chandigarh | 34 | 16 |

# 10 killed in Uttarakhand as avalanche strikes again

Over 380 people rescued, more causalties feared as dozens of people still unaccounted for; bad weather hampering relief works

**VINEET UPADHYAY** @ Dehradun

A little over two months after the deadly glacier burst and avalanche that claimed hundreds of lives in Uttarakhand's Chamoli, a similar incident has hit the same district.

There was another avalanche caused presumably by a glacier break in Malari-Sumna region in Niti Valley near the Tibet border. A total of 10 bodies have been recovered and 384 persons rescued.

Swati Bhadauria, the district magistrate of Chamoli, said: "Rescue operations are underway and the injured have been airlifted to Joshimath. One has to be referred to in Dehradun." Officials said that a majority of the victims are from Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

There are also a few from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and elsewhere. They were working on a road project under the Border Roads Organisation. According to estimates, around 430 persons were staying in two camps for the workers when the avalanche followed by the glacier break struck.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat after conducting an aerial survey said: "Operations by combined teams of Indian Army, National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force and district administration are underway in full swing. No damages have been reported from nearby villages."

The avalanche hit the camp on Friday at around 4 pm. Rescue operations were launched immediately, but efforts got delayed due to bad weather. Though an army camp is located at about just three kilometers from the spot, snowfall and rain impeded rescue efforts. Officials from BRO said that access points are blocked.

The higher reaches of hilly areas of Uttarakhand including Niti Valley received 4-5 feet of snowfall recently.

Snow has blocked connecting roads and landslides have blocked roads at various points. Officials informed that the Border Roads Task Force is clearing the road, which may take 6-8 hours if not more.

The Indian Army issued a statement on Friday evening saying that 'blizzard conditions' kept rescue operations at bay till late evening.

"In a night rescue operation undertaken by the Army, 150 GREF persons trapped in the BRO camp have been rescued and brought to safety. Rescue operations are still in progress to locate the remaining persons still trapped under snow or stranded at worksites since late evening. Mountaineering rescue teams and air effort are on stand-by for further rescue operations," it said.

Sumna is around 40kms from Raini village towards the Indo-Tibetan border from Joshimath of Chamoli district, where the February disaster, which killed over 80, struck.

*Rescue operations are still in progress to locate the remaining persons trapped under snow or stranded at worksites* - The Indian Army statement

Rescue operation underway after a glacier broke off in the Sumna area near Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Friday | PTI

# Corruption: CBI files FIR against Deshmukh

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**
@ Mumbai

The CBI on Saturday registered an FIR against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh in an alleged corruption case and also carried out searches at multiple locations linked to him and his close associates.

Anil Deshmukh has been charged under Section 7 of the amended Prevention of Corruption Act dealing with illegal gratification obtained by a public servant and IPC Section 120 B (criminal conspiracy). Deshmukh has said he will cooperate with the probe agency.

The FIR was registered on April 21 after the CBI satisfied itself that there was enough evidence to proceed with a regular case against Deshmukh. The searches could not be launched immediately as the team had to first get an RT-PCR test done for Covid-19. The probe agency seized electronic gadgets and incriminating documents from four locations across Maharashtra in a case related to Deshmukh and others.

The FIR is a culmination of a preliminary enquiry (PE) the CBI had initiated on the directions of the Bombay High Court a fortnight ago. The court had passed directions on the basis of a petition filed by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh, who alleged Deshmukh had demanded ₹100 crore be collected as bribes from bars and restaurants in the city.

Anil Deshmukh speaks to the media at his residence on Saturday | PTI

Deshmukh belongs to the NCP, a party of the three-party ruling alliance in the state. State party chief Jayant Patil on Saturday termed the FIR against his party colleague as a political vendetta for settling political scores. He said the CBI was overstepping its mandate. "The Bombay High Court had asked it to conduct a primary inquiry and submit the report. What happened to the report? Has the report been submitted?"

**INSURGENCY**

# Two of abducted ONGC workers rescued after gunfight in Nagaland

**PRASANTA MAZUMDAR** @ Guwahati

TWO of the three ONGC employees who were abducted by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) from Assam, were rescued by the security forces after a gunfight in Nagaland's Mon district in the early hours of Saturday.

"In an operation, the Indian Army along with members of Assam Rifles rescued two abductees in the Mon district. An operation is underway to rescue the third person. Alakesh Saikia and Mohini Mohan Gogoi are the two rescued employees. An AK-47 rifle has been recovered," an Army official said.

The three workers were abducted from an ONGC oil rig in the Lakwa field of Assam's Sivasagar district in the wee hours of Wednesday by five ULFA militants.

The Assam police had arrested 14 people, including ULFA sympathizers, in connection with the incident.

The gunfight broke out around 2 am at a forested area near Totokchingnyu village in Mon, official sources in Nagaland said. It is not know how many militants were at the site. Sources, however, said it was a mixed group of militants from the ULFA and the Yung Aung faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland or NSCN (YA).

**The personnel had managed to rescue the two persons amid the gunfight. The third person is still in the custody of the militants**
An official

"The personnel had managed to rescue the two persons amid the gunfight. The third person is still in the custody of the militants. The operation to rescue him is on," the sources added.

The ULFA operates out of Myanmar and is a constituent of an umbrella organisation of militant groups from the Northeast, which is led by the NSCN (YA). The outfits work in close coordination with each other.

# Body of policeman abducted by Maoists found

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** @ Raipur

MAOISTS have killed a Chhattisgarh sub-inspector of police, who was abducted on April 21. His body was found near a village in the Bijapur district.

In a note left near his body, the Maoists claimed he had been supporting the Bastar police force in their anti-Maoist operations since the Salwa Judum campaign of 2006. After joining the District Reserve Guards (DRG), Murli Tati was involved in many confrontations with the Maoists and as well as the harassment of local villagers, the militants said.

"Tati, a resident of Bijapur, was posted at Jagdalpur district for the past couple of years. He was away from his duty at his native place for the past one and a half months without informing the department. After he was kidnapped by the Maoists, the police tried to locate him by reaching out to local villagers and other sources", said Sunderraj P, Bastar zone inspector general of police.

In a separate incident in Chhattisgarh, a tragedy was averted as a vigilant loco pilot of the Vishakhapatnam-Jagdalpur-Kirandul Express applied emergency brakes on spotting, from a distance, that fishplates were missing on the track ahead.

A fishplate is a metal bar that is bolted to the ends of two rails to join them together in a track. "A major mishap was averted as the loco pilot noticed from a distance that the railway track was somewhat trembling over a bridge. He applied the emergency brakes, which caused the engine to derail," a sources said.

# N V Ramana takes over as 48th CJI

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**
@ New Delhi

JUSTICE Nuthalapati Venkata Ramana was on Saturday sworn in as the 48th Chief Justice of India and will hold the post for sixteen months till August 26, 2022.

He is taking charge amid a health emergency in the country prompted by a surge in Covid cases. His predecessor and former CJI S A Bobde had taken suo-moto cognizance of the issue of oxygen supply shortage, but could not take any major actions. He had slated a hearing for April 27.

Soon after he was sworn in, Ramana held a consultation with six senior judges of the court to review its functioning in view of the present Covid-19 situation.

His tenure is expected to see the filing up of more vacancies for judges at both the Supreme Court as well at the High Courts.

Apart from CJI Ramana, the new collegium would comprise four justices—R F Nariman, U U Lalit, A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud.

The inclusion of more women judges in the higher reaches of the judiciary, a goal laid down by former CJI S A Bobde, now falls on the shoulders of Ramana. The name of Senior Judge B V Nagarathna from the Karnataka High Court is doing the rounds. If elevated now, she will be in line to become the first woman Chief Justice of India in 2027, for a period of eight months.

Similarly, Chief Justice of Telangana High Court Justice Hima Kohli's is also being considered for elevation. If appointed now, her tenure will run till 2024, or else she will retire in September this year.

Though these names have been discussed many times in the collegium meetings, no consensus has been reached. So, all eyes will now be on CJI Ramana who is expected to break the ice and give India its first women Chief Justice, several years after independence.

President Ram Nath Kovind administers the oath of office to Justice N V Ramana at the Rashtrapathi Bhavan on Saturday | PTI

# Have proof of EC-BJP nexus, says Mamata

**PRANAB MONDAL** @ Kolkata

WEST Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday shared WhatsApp messages allegedly sent by some poll panel officials to certain police personnel, asking them to detain Trinamool Congress workers who were branded as "trouble makers".

Mamata said she has gathered enough evidence to prove that Election Commission officials are in cahoots with the Bharatiya Janata Party.

"In the WhatsApp messages, these election observers have described Trinamool Congress party workers as trouble mongers. I have seen the message exchanged between them and some police officers," she said. "Some of our DMs and SPs are crossing their limits. Are they echoing the BJP? I will not say anything now. After the polls, I will take up the issue," Mamata said in Bolpur.

The Trinamool Congress supremo said her next move would be to knock on the door of the Supreme Court

"I will move the Supreme Court seeking its intervention. Retired people are being sent as observers. This set of retired persons are issuing orders to serving officers," she alleged.

Accusing the BJP of being "power-hungry" and criticising the Commission's decision not to club the final three phases of the Assembly elections in the state, she said the Centre was aware that the Covid situation would worsen in January but did not take any steps.

"Instead, the Centre went ahead with eight-phase to satisfy their lust for power," she alleged. Alleging that the state's police force is also working at the behest of the BJP, she said many TMC workers were picked up from their houses on the morning of the sixth phase of the elections. "This was done to ensure the BJP's victory. Even after adopting all these methods, BJP will not be able to bag more than 70 seats."

All India Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee offering puja at Tarapith Temple in Birbhum in West Bengal | BIPASH LODH

**EXPRESS READ**

## PDP chief slams Centre's social media monitoring

Srinagar: PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Saturday said the Centre's "paranoia" about Kashmiris has touched "a new low" with social media accounts of government employees now allegedly being monitored. The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister was reacting to a news report she shared on Twitter. The report claimed that a new directive by the Jammu and Kashmir administration requires the social media history of government employees to be scanned for objectionable activity. "Even as India gasps for breath thanks to GOI's inept handling of Covid, it's paranoia about Kashmiris has touched a new low with social media of government employees now being monitored," she said.

## Cops turn angels by arranging oxygen

A team of police personnel from Jabalpur's Lordganj station helped save the lives of at least 60 critical Covid patients by arranging the supply of oxygen cylinders. The patients were undergoing treatment at a private hospital in the city. Led by Circle Inspector Kotwali Dipak Mishra, a team of 15 police personnel rushed to the Galaxy Hospital on being informed about an oxygen shortage. When they reached the hospital around 3 am, five of the 65 patients had died. The police team then quickly arranged the necessary number of oxygen cylinders and themselves carried them into the hospital.

**BHOPAL DIARY**

ANURAAG SINGH
Our correspondent in Madhya Pradesh
singhanuraag.jaurno@gmail.com

## Young doctor drives 180 km on scooty to save patients

A young doctor from Madhya Pradesh was in the middle of a sanctioned leave when she came to know that the hospital where she works in Maharashtra was facing a crisis situation amid a surge in the number of Covid patients. Wasting no time, Pragya Gharde left for Nagpur from Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district in her scooter. After a seven-hour journey that saw her traverse the dangerous forest areas of her native state on a two-wheeler, she reached Nagpur. Gharde had no choice but to travel on her scooter if she is to reach Nagpur on time, as public transport was unavailable due to the lockdown. She is now in Nagpur, fulfilling her responsibilities in a PPE kit at the Covid Care Centre of the hospital. Nagpur district on Saturday saw its highest ever single-day spike of 7,999 Covid-19 cases that raised the tally of infections to 3,66,417, an official said.

## Youths on a mission to find oxygen cylinders

Five youths of the Chhindwara district have dedicated themselves to helping the kin of severe Covid patients find oxygen cylinders. Helped by a donation of about `14 lakh, Rahul Dwivedi, Ajay Rajput, Shobhit Miglani, Vishal Kalia and Sandeep Malwi have so far arranged 120 oxygen cylinders from Ghaziabad to the patients in their district. Efforts are being made to get another 40 cylinders from Pune. These cylinders are being made available to those in need on the payment of a refundable security deposit

## Nepalese woman reunited with family

A 70-year-old woman from Janakpur in Nepal, who was separated from her family by a recent flood, has been reunited with her family. After the floods, Tara Bai somehow reached the Umaria district of Madhya Pradesh, which is more than a hundred kilometers away from Janakpur. In Umaria's Bijpur village, she has been staying with a family for more than one year. "She was living with a local family in Bijpur village here since last year's lockdown. After year-long efforts, her family was traced to Nepal recently. She was reunited with her kin subsequently," officials said.

**Merkel defends 'tough' new restrictions**

Berlin: Chancellor Angela Merkel has urged Germans to accept nationwide pandemic restrictions, resulting in a 10pm-5am curfew. She acknowledged the rules are 'tough' but insisted they are needed to curb Covid spread.

**A gift to Damascus: 1,50,000 vaccine doses**

Damascus: Syria received the first batch of Chinese Covid vaccines on Saturday, a gift of 150,000 jabs to Damascus, officials said. The Chinese batch comes a few days after 2,00,000 jabs were delivered to Syria via a UN-led platform.

# End killings, ASEAN leaders tell Myanmar junta

Situation unacceptable and should not continue, says Indonesian president; call to begin dialogue between contending parties

**JAKARTA**

SOUTHEAST Asian leaders demanded an immediate end to killings and the release of political detainees in Myanmar in an emergency summit with its top general and coup leader on Saturday in Jakarta, said Indonesia's president.

The leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also told Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing during the two-hour talks in Jakarta that a dialogue between contending parties in Myanmar should immediately start, with the help of ASEAN envoys, Indonesian President Joko Widodo said.

"The situation in Myanmar is unacceptable and should not continue. Violence must be stopped, democracy, stability and peace in Myanmar must be returned immediately," Widodo said during the meeting. "The interests of the people of Myanmar must always be the priority."

Daily shootings by police and soldiers since the February 1 coup have killed more than 700 mostly peaceful protesters and bystanders, according to several independent tallies. The messages conveyed to Min Aung Hlaing were unusually blunt and could be seen as a breach of the conservative 10-nation bloc's bedrock principle forbidding member states from interfering in each other's domestic affairs.

But Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said the policy should not lead to inaction if a domestic situation "jeopardises the peace, security, and stability of ASEAN and the wider region" and there is international clamour for resolute action. "There is a tremendous expectation on the part of the international community on how ASEAN is addressing the Myanmar issue. The pressure is increasing," Muhyiddin said, and added that the current ASEAN chairman, Brunei PM Hassanal Bolkiah, and the regional bloc's secretary general should be allowed access to Myanmar to meet contending parties, encourage dialogue and come up with "an honest and unbiased observation". Such a political dialogue "can only take place with the prompt and unconditional release of political detainees," the Malaysian premier said.

A formal statement issued by ASEAN through Brunei after the summit outlined the demands made by the heads of state in more subtle terms.

It asked for the "immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar" and urged all parties to "exercise utmost restraint," but omitted the demand voiced by Widodo and other leaders for the immediate release of political detainees. It said ASEAN would provide humanitarian aid to Myanmar.

It was not immediately clear if and how Min Aung Hlaing responded to the blunt messages. *AP*

Indonesian President Joko Widodo (centre) adjusts his facemask while delivering his speech at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) talks on Myanmar crisis, in Jakarta | AFP

# Debris found, Indonesian navy declares lost sub sank

**BANYUWANGI**

INDONESIA'S navy on Saturday said items were found from a missing submarine, indicating the vessel with 53 crew members had sunk and cracked open, and that there was no hope of finding survivors.

Military chief Hadi Tjahjanto said the presence of an oil slick as well as the discovery of debris near the location of KRI Nanggala 402's last dive on Wednesday off the island of Bali were clear proof the vessel had sunk.

Indonesia earlier considered the vessel to be only missing. Navy Chief Yudo Margono told a press conference in Bali, "If it's an explosion, it will be in pieces. The cracks happened gradually in some parts when it went down from 300 metres to 400 metres to 500 metres... If there was an explosion, it would be heard by the sonar."

The navy previously said it believes the submarine sank to a depth of 600-700 metres (2,000-2,300 feet), much deeper than its collapse depth of 200 metres (655 feet), at which point water pressure would be greater than the hull could withstand. The cause of the disappearance was still uncertain. The navy had previously said an electrical failure could have left the submarine unable to execute emergency procedures to resurface.

Margono said in the past two days, searchers found parts of a torpedo straightener, a grease bottle believed to be used to oil the periscope, debris from prayer rugs and a broken piece from a coolant pipe that was refitted on the submarine in South Korea in 2012. "With the authentic evidence we found believed to be from the submarine, we have now moved from the 'sub miss phase to sub sunk," Margono said at the press conference, in which the found items were displayed. Margono said rescue teams from Indonesia and other countries will evaluate the findings. He said no bodies have been found so far. Officials previously said the submarine's oxygen supply would have run out early on Saturday.

An American reconnaissance plane, a P-8 Poseidon, landed early on Saturday and had been set to join the search, along with 20 Indonesian ships, a sonar-equipped Australian warship and four Indonesian aircraft.

Singaporean rescue ships were also expected on Saturday, while Malaysian rescue vessels were due to arrive on Sunday, bolstering the underwater hunt, officials said earlier on Saturday.

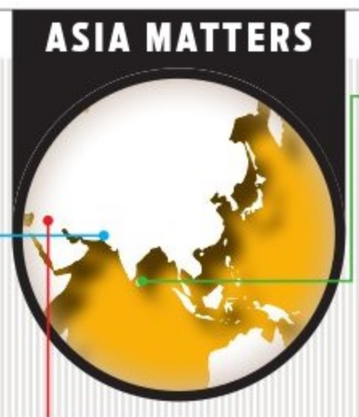
Family members had held out hopes for survivors but there were no sign of life from the vessel. Indonesian President Joko Widodo had ordered all-out efforts to locate the submarine and asked Indonesians to pray for the crew's safe return. Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago nation with more than 17,000 islands, has faced growing challenges to its maritime claims in recent years, including numerous incidents involving Chinese vessels near the Natuna islands. *AP*

**IN SERVICE SINCE 1981**

The German-built diesel-powered KRI Nanggala 402 has been in service in Indonesia since 1981 and was carrying 49 crew members and three gunners as well as its commander, the Indonesian Defence Ministry said.

A naval officer displaying parts of the torpedo system found in the search operation for the Navy's KRI Nanggala submarine | AFP

## ASIA MATTERS



**PAKISTAN**

**157 Covid deaths reported in one day**

Pakistan has reported 157 coronavirus deaths in the last 24 hours, the highest since last year, while the number of fresh cases recorded were 5,908, the health ministry said on Saturday. The Ministry of National Health Services said 53 out of the 157 people who succumbed to the viral disease died while being on ventilator. "Pakistan has reported the death of 157 people in the last 24 hours due to coronavirus. This is the highest since June 20 last year when 153 people died due to the disease within a day," the ministry said in a statement. The current Covid deaths in Pakistan stands at 16,999 while the total number of cases have gone up to 7,90,016. "At least 6,86,488 people recovered so far across Pakistan, making it a significant count. Total number of active cases in Pakistan was 86,529," the ministry said.

**SYRIA**

**Oil tanker off Syria coast on fire, govt says drone attack**

Syria's oil ministry said a fire has erupted in a tanker on its coast after what it said was a suspected drone attack on Saturday. The official state news agency said the fire in the oil tanker outside Baniyas refinery has been extinguished. The oil ministry said the fire started after a suspected drone attack that originated from the Lebanese territorial waters. It provided no further details and did not specify where the tanker was arriving from. There has been a series of mysterious attacks on vessels in recent months. They have come amid rising tension in the region between Iran, Israel and the US.

**SRI LANKA**

**'New and more potent strain of virus detected'**

A new coronavirus strain that is airborne and more potent than all those found previously in Sri Lanka has been discovered in the island nation, according to a top immunologist here. The variant, which is highly transmissible, can remain airborne for nearly an hour and is spreading fast, Neelika Malavige, the head of the Department of Immunology and Molecular Sciences of the Sri Jayawardenapura University said. "This variant of coronavirus is more highly transmissible than all found so far in the island. The new strain is airborne, the droplets can remain airborne for nearly an hour," Malavige said. Health authorities feared that the new variant is spreading rapidly after last week's New Year celebrations with more younger people getting infected.

# Easter Sunday attacks: Former Sri Lankan minister held

**COLOMBO**

SRI Lankan Police on Saturday arrested a former minister and his brother for allegedly aiding and abetting the suicide bombers responsible for the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks in which 258 people, including 11 Indians, were killed.

Rishad Bathiudeen, the leader of a minority Muslim party that is part of the main Opposition party, the SJB, and his brother Riyaj Bathiudeen were arrested from their respective residences. "They have been arrested under the provisions of the prevention of terrorism Act based on direct, circumstantial and scientific evidence," said Ajith Rohana, the senior deputy inspector general who is also the police spokesman.

Nine suicide bombers, belonging to local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat linked to ISIS, carried out a series of blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday on April 21, 2019.

In May last year, Riyaj was arrested for making contacts with suicide bombers and given bail in October. Rishad, a former Minister of Industry and Commerce, was arrested in October and was granted bail in November over the misappropriation of state resources.

Their arrests came just after the second anniversary of the deadly attacks.

Ahead of the anniversary, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the head of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, expressed doubts over the bail being granted to Riyaj. He wondered if the action was due to a political deal. In late October, some of the legislators who are members of Rishad's party had voted in support of the government for the 20th amendment to the Constitution.

Ranjith also expressed disappointment over the findings of the government investigation panel. *PTI*

# *Nepal reopens quake-toppled historic tower*

**Nepal on Saturday inaugurated a replica of a historic tower that collapsed in a devastating 2015 earthquake, a day before the disaster's sixth anniversary**

The 19th-century, nine-storey Dharahara tower, a major tourist attraction, was among buildings which crumbled in the 7.8-magnitude quake that killed nearly 9,000 people

Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli inaugurated the new 23-storey, 84-metre (276-foot) white tower, built next to the rubble of the original, by raining flowers from the top-floor balcony

Two underground floors have also been built, to hold a museum about the quake

The tower had already been rebuilt once, after a 1934 earthquake

More than 50 people were killed when the original 50-metre (165-foot) tower — known for its views across the capital — fell in 2015

Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli (centre) waves during the inauguration ceremony of the new 23-storey, 84-metre white tower, built next to the rubble of the 19th-century historic Dharahara tower that collapsed in a 2015 earthquake, in Kathmandu | AFP

**The new tower is part of a huge national reconstruction programme**

The rebuilding has been hit by political infighting and bureaucracy and many buildings, including health and government institutions and schools, are unfinished

AFP

# JERUSALEM TENSION TRIGGERS GAZA-ISRAEL FIRE EXCHANGE

**JERUSALEM**

PALESTINIAN militants in the Gaza Strip fired some three dozen rockets into Israel overnight on Saturday, while the Israeli military struck back at targets operated by the ruling Hamas group. The exchange came as tensions in Jerusalem spilled over into the worst round of cross-border violence in months.

The barrage of rocket fire came as hundreds of Palestinians clashed with Israeli police in east Jerusalem. The clashes, in which at least four police and six protesters were injured, have become a nightly occurrence throughout the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and show no signs of stopping.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he held talks with top security officials about Gaza and Jerusalem. He said he instructed officials to be ready for every scenario in Gaza. In Jerusalem, he said Israel would guarantee freedom of worship for everyone, and he appealed for calm. "We ask now for people to obey the law and I call for a calming of tempers on all sides."

The UN envoy to the region, Tor Wennesland, condemned the violence and said the United Nations was working with all sides to restore calm.

"The provocative acts across Jerusalem must cease. The indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres violates international law and must stop immediately," he said. "I reiterate my call upon all sides to exercise maximum restraint and avoid further escalation, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan and this politically charged time for all."

> **The provocative acts across Jerusalem must cease. The indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres violates international law**
>
> Tor Wennesland, UN envoy

Meanwhile, Israeli chief of staff, Lt Gen Aviv Kochavi, is weighing "a series of steps for possible responses", and preparations if the situation continued to escalate, the military said in a statement. He also postponed a trip to the United States that was scheduled for Sunday.

People stand in front of a building baring traces of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip, in kibbutz Kissufim in southern Israel, on Saturday | AFP

**EXPRESS READ**

**Man shot after charging at US officer with knives**

Nashville (US): A Tennessee police officer fatally shot a man who charged at the officer with knives during a traffic stop early Saturday, authorities said. Metropolitan Nashville Police Department Officer Christopher Royer has been placed on administrative assignment after he shot the man on a Nashville road, department spokesman Don Aaron said. The man died at a hospital, Aaron said. He was not immediately identified. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation will investigate the shooting and the police department will also review it.

SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY

E- Tender Notice No. UBLS-E-01-2021-22 Dated: 21.04.2021

The undersigned, on behalf of the President of India, invites E-tenders for the following work :

| Name of Work | Approx. Value |
|---|---|
| Hubballi Workshop: Extension of tracks in carriage lift section till production shop - Electrical arrangements. | Rs. 18,18,896/- |

Last date for submission of bids: Up to 15:00 hrs. of 12.05.2021

For details log on: www.ireps.gov.in

Chief Workshop Manager (Electrical) Hubballi

PUB/25/AAV/PRB/SWR/2021-22

SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY

Open Tender Notice No. SBC-TRO-Fuelling-02-2021

The undersigned, on behalf of The President of India invites e-tenders for the following work.

| Name of work | Approx.Value |
|---|---|
| Outsourcing of traction & non - traction fuelling at Bangalore City, Yesvantpur & SGT for a period of 730 days. | Rs. 1,37,46,974.30 |

Last date for submission of bid : 17-05-2021 Upto 15.00 Hrs.

For full details of tender notice including eligibility criteria and downloading of the tender documents, tenderer may log on to website: www.ireps.gov.in

Senior Divisional Railway Manager (Electrical)/ TRO, South Western Railway, Bangalore

PUB/06/AAS/PRB/SBC/2021-22

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A Mumbai based Well known Pharmaceutical Company (Speciality in NEURO PSYCHIATRIC SEGMENT) is going to recruit for the post of

M.R. / AFM / AFS / RSM

for CHENNAI & KERALA states. Experienced and Fresher interested candidates may apply through C V before 30/04/2021

eaubiotic@rediffmail.com
kclabs@rediffmail.com

CHANGE OF NAME

CHANGE OF NAME

I, GAURAV BHUSHAN SUBHASH GOTHI, S/o SUBHASH GOTHI, residing at- No.101102, NIKOO HOMES-1, Bharatiya City, Thanisandra Main Road, Bengaluru-560064, Karnataka, changed the name of my minor son aged 17 years (DoB:29-Apr-2003), from PALASH GAURAV BHUSHAN to PALASH GOTHI vide affidavit dated 23.04.2021 sworn before Notary T. Hanmanth Rao at Bangalore.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is information to the General Public that my clients (1) A. KUMUTHA, W/o. Arulmozhi Shanmugam, (2) S.A. EZHIRKO, S/o. Arulmozhi Shanmugam, and (3) M. Tamilvani, W/o. S.A.Ezhirko, R/a No.922, 12th Main, 17th Cross, ISRO Layout, Bangalroe-560 078, are inteno to purchase the Schedule property from its owner Smt.SAROJAMMA S.K., W/o. Sri Balakrishna, R/a No.226, Kesare 3rd Stage, R.S.Naidu Nagar, Mysore-570 007. If anybody having any right, share, claim or objection to the proposed purchase may file their objections in writing along with copies of supporting documents, within 10 days from the date of this publication to the purchaser's advocate at below mentioned address, failing which my client will be advised to go ahead and complete the formalities for registration of the sale deed in respect of the Schedule Property.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

All that pieace and parcel of vacant Site No.172, Katha No.172, presently New Property No. 150200102900200720 and Property No. 172/172 (as per Village Panchayathi records), situated in the Layout known as "AISHWARYA GOLDEN NEST" approved by BMRDA, in Sy.Nos.111/1A, 111/1B, 111/3, 117/1, 117/2, 124, 125/1, 125/2 and 213 of KOPPA Vilage, Jigani Hobli, Anekal Taluk,, measuring East to West : 80 feet or 24.384 Meters and North to South : 50 Feet or 15.24 Meters, totally measuring 4000 square feet or 371.61 Square Meters and bounded on the:

East by : Site Nos.191 & 192
West by : Road
North by : Site No.171
South by : Road.

R.R.Upadhya, Advocate
RAVISHANKAR ASSOCIATES,
#92, 2nd Main Road, Between 7th & 8th Cross, Chamrajpet, Bangalore -560 018
Mobile: 9241102941

**$582.4 bn** was India's forex reserve as of April 16, according to RBI data. This was an increase of $1.193 billion over the previous week

# Tax compliance timelines extended by two months

Vivad se Vishwas payment time limit has been extended to June 30

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

TO ease hardships faced by taxpayers amid the second wave of Covid-19, the government has extended the deadline for several tax compliances including making payment under the Vivad se Vishwas scheme to June 30. It has also extended the due date for issuance of notice for reopening of assessment by tax officers where income has escaped assessment and sending intimation of processing of Equalisation Levy till June 30.

"The time for payment of the amount payable under the Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Act, 2020, without an additional amount, has been extended to June 30," Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement. The deadline for filing declaration under the scheme ended on March 31.

The Vivad Se Vishwas scheme provides for settlement of disputed tax, interest, penalty or fees in relation to an assessment or reassessment order on payment of 100 per cent of the disputed tax and 25 per cent of the disputed penalty or interest or fee. The taxpayer is granted immunity from levy of interest, penalty and institution of any proceeding for prosecution for any offence under the Income-tax Act in respect of matters covered in the declaration. CBDT said it had received requests from taxpayers, tax consultants and other stakeholders to extend time barring dates in view of the severe COVID-19 pandemic raging unabated across the country.

The scheme had netted about ?54,000 crore to the exchequer till early April and more is expected to come in based on the declarations already filed.

"While it's a welcome move, that no additional amount payable under the Vivad se Vishwas has been extended to June 30, it would have been good if they would have also extended the filing deadline beyond March 31 for such category to say May 31 so that more taxpayers could avail of the scheme," said Karishma Phatarphekar, partner, Deloitte India. Further the government can consider enhancing the scope of the scheme to cover taxpayers whose appeal are pending beyond January 31, 2020. "It would be timely if the government can also extend the deadline for filing appeals before CIT(A) or ITAT," pointed out Phatarphekar.

Artist Paresh Maity at work during lockdown

# Covid lockdown a blessing in disguise for art market

PAVAN LALL

THE last several quarters have seen the art world record astronomical auction prices for pieces by masters. Galleries such as Saffronart, Pundoles and others have seen collectors pay unprecedented prices for works.

Ashvin Rajagopalan, director of the Piramal Foundation of Art, says that "Production of artworks was initially limited. But now artists are working on paintings in small volume"

Auctions on the other are a whole other matter." Many world records were broken between September to April, this year with just April 2021 having seen auction sales of ₹260 crore," he says, adding that the "sales are good because a lot of people have made money in business and also lots of people have pulled out from alternate investments and placed them in art which is more secure."

India's art market was valued at around ₹200 crore in 2000, and has grown to around ₹1,700 crore in 2020, and if it follows that trajectory by 2040 will reach about ₹16,000 crore a year, so the CAGR is to be reckoned with," Rajagopalan says.

"Artists love seclusion and loneliness without any disturbance and interference," says Paresh Maity, a senior and leading modern Indian artist. If they can work for long periods of time on their own that's the best thing for them from a point of productivity."

No phone calls, long meditative stretches of time, reduced travel, and reduced interruptions, reduced meetings are all optimum for any working artist, he says. "Yet don't forget that the world has been in a crisis and if you look at the first and second world war these are the times when the best art in the history of man has been created. Case in point as example, Picasso's Guernica."

Struggles can be used to produce the best art and when alone. "I mostly work when alone which has been easier to do in a lockdown," Maity says, adding that his process of work became much more intense." He says the air was clearer, the sky was clearer, the sun shone brighter and the eternal quest for peace and quiet became easier to work and produce work in. Today Modern and contemporary artists are better than most in the global scene but that is starting to happen and these are potential reasons why prices are driving higher.

One reason for prices going up is because the number of collectors for certain senior artists who aren't alive anymore is appreciating faster. "The unfortunate history is that artists when alive don't see their work price as well as when they are not. Gaitonde's funeral needed funds to be collected while his work is breaking global records for prices now, so that's worth noting," says Maity.

> I have noticed that people have started looking more closely at how paintings and imagery inspire them and can shape and influence their surroundings and that in the end is what art does
>
> Paresh Maity

Exhibitions became easier to market to wider audiences because they were all Online and thus driving in large audiences regardless of geographies and borders. Leading auction houses that include Christies and Sotheby's conducted well over a 100 + Online auctions each last year itself, in response to demand from collectors and investors alike. Javed Abdulla, a professional art consultant who has worked with international art houses says that the pandemic has not been a leveller and there are top buyers whose wealth has multiplied and so the sales have increased disproportionately.

He points to the recent auction of Eastern art conducted by Sotheby's that has had strong results in recent weeks.

"I have noticed that people have started looking more closely as well at how paintings and imagery inspire them and can shape and influence their surroundings and that in the end is what art does," points out Maity.

*(The author is a senior journalist based in Mumbai)*

EXPRESS READ

## ICICI Bank Q4 net profit rises more than two-folds to ₹4,403 cr

New Delhi: Private sector lender ICICI Bank Ltd. saw its net profit rise sharply over a year ago as core income improved and provisions were lower compared to a year ago. Net profit increased 260.5 per cent to ₹4,402.61 crore for quarter ending March 2021. The profit in the corresponding period last year stood at ₹1,221.4 crore. Net interest income or core income rose 16.9 per cent in Q4FY21 to ₹10,431.13 crore as compared to ₹8,926.9 crore in Q4FY20. Provisions and contingencies, as expected, fell sharply by 51.7 per cent year-on-year to ₹2,883.47 crore in the quarter ended March 2021, even though the same increased 5.2 per cent on the sequential basis.

GURBIR SINGH

NEWSCOPE

# COAL POLLUTERS CHALLENGE JOE BIDEN'S CLIMATE COMMITMENTS

ONE can see a refreshing change of course from the days of science-denying Donald Trump. US President Joe Biden, speaking at the Global Climate Summit a few days ago, pledged to cut carbon emissions by 50-52 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, effectively doubling previous commitments. "Scientists tell us that this is the decisive decade — this is the decade we must make decisions that will avoid the worst consequences of the climate crisis," Biden said.

The pledge was for keeping the Earth's temperature from rising more than 1.5C. "The world beyond 1.5 degrees means more frequent and intense fires, floods, droughts, heatwaves and hurricanes tearing through communities, ripping away lives and livelihoods," said a passionate Biden.

Avril Haines, President Biden's director of national intelligence, echoed Biden. She told the Climate Summit that climate change was no longer a peripheral issue, but at the "center of a country's national security and foreign policy." To stress that the US' money was where its mouth is, Biden announced the US would double aid for developing countries fighting environmental degradation.

While Europe applauded, two of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, China and India, made no new commitments. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made general comments on how India was on the path of achieving its renewable energy target of 450 gigawatts by 2030.

China's President Xi Jinping hit back at the West by pointing out that historically the US accounts for the largest share of emissions and the US and exhorted the other Western industrialized nations to do more to slow down global warming. "The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities must be upheld," Xi said.

### The dirtiest of polluters

At the center of the strategy to prevent Climate Change is the ground reality of coal. The international advocacy group Endcoal, points out coal is the single biggest contributor to anthropogenic climate change. The burning of coal is responsible for 46% of carbon dioxide emissions worldwide and accounts for 72 per cent of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the electricity sector. There are 1,200 new coal-fired power stations at various stages of implementation. If these are commissioned, the emissions from these plants would cause global temperatures to rise by over 5 degrees Celsius by 2100, pushing the Earth's ecosystem towards catastrophe.

Despite all the commitments of political leaders over the last few decades, between 2001 and 2010, world consumption of coal increased 45 per cent. During the same time period, total greenhouse gas emissions were the highest in human history.

On paper, everyone agrees the age of coal must soon come to an end. But the ground reality is different. Though reduced demand triggered a fall in coal production during last year's pandemic, the recovery has now triggered a 4.5 per cent rise in demand for coal as the world's three biggest consumers of the dirtiest of fossil fuels begin hiking their coal usage. US power plants are set to consume 16 per cent more coal this year compared to 2020, and then another 3 per cent in 2022, the Energy Information Administration said recently.

China and India, which together account for two-thirds of coal consumption, have no plans to cut back in the near term. India, despite all its solar, wind and other renewable energy projects, still generates 70 per cent of its power production from coal-fired plants.

AMIT BANDRE

### China, India stumble

It's not that the climate change campaign hasn't worked. Many developing countries have bitten the bullet and rolled back coal power stations. In South Africa, after years of lawsuits, plans to build a coal-fired power station in Limpopo Province were cancelled last November. Chinese-funded projects are stalled in Kenya, Egypt and Bangladesh.

The problem is China and India. China has been on a rebound since about mid-2020, with production of cement, steel and other industries being fired by the cheap energy generator, coal. New coal-based power plants in China have added 38 gigawatts of capacity in 2020. India is on the roll too with 60 gigawatts of coal-fired plants in the pipeline till 2026.

Unfortunately, the Indian and Chinese leadership justify their continued reliance on fossil fuels using the high moral ground of being nations that have been exploited for decades by colonialism. "And now it is our turn to go berserk," they seem to be saying.

In a recent interaction with French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, India's environment minister Prakash Javadekar, said: "The poor of this world have the right to grow, and we will do so sustainably." But, he added, environmental damage is a result of 150 years of heavy industrialization and emissions of the western nations. And hence, "all of us need to act, but those who have polluted more must also act more," he argued.

Javadekar is right. The biggest polluters must pay. Fortunately, Joe Biden has redrawn the rules of engagement, and have agreed to foot the bill for a cleaner and safer energy route. India and China should not lose this opportunity.

# Govt waives import duty on vaccines, oxygen and related gear

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

IN a bid to boost medical oxygen availability in the country amid a severe shortage across several states, including the national capital, the union government decided to exempt basics customs duty on import of COVID-19 vaccines, and the basic customs duty and health cess on import of medical grade oxygen and other equipment related to providing oxygen to patients, for a period of three months till July 31 with immediate effect. The decision was taken in a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to review steps taken to boost oxygen availability in the country. According to an official statement, the move will boost availability of these items and make them cheaper.

Modi also directed the revenue department to ensure seamless and quick custom clearance of such equipment. "The PM emphasised that there was an immediate need to augment the supply of medical grade oxygen as well as equipment required for patient care both at home and in hospitals. The PM stressed that all ministries and departments need to work in synergyto increase availability of oxygen and medical supplies," the statement said. While basic customs duty on Remdesivir and its active pharmaceutical ingredients has been waived, it was suggested that import of equipment related to providing oxygen to patients needs to be expedited. Apart from medical grade oxygen, the customs duty has been exemption has been extended to oxygen cylinders including cryogenic cylinders and tanks, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cannisters, filling systems, storage tanks, ventilators, compressors, along with other similar items.

The statement noted that the government has taken a lot of measures in the last few days to improve supply of oxygen and medical supplies.

"IAF planes are bringing in cryogenic oxygen tanks from Singapore. IAF is also transporting oxygen tanks in the country to reduce travel times," the Finance Ministry said.

### Items that will benefit from the decision

Medical grade oxygen, oxygen concentrator along with flow meter, oxygen plants, cryogenic oxygen air separation units (ASUs) producing liquid/ gaseous oxygen, oxygen tanks, filling systems, among others.

# Business & Beyond

### DSP steps in to supply liquid medical oxygen

Durgapur Steel Plant (DSP) has decided to extend its helping hand by supplying about 34 tons of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO). It had supplied 1,235 tons of LMO to various medical bodies during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic last year. As the pandemic rages, India's healthcare system is near breaking point, with thousands of critically sick people failing to secure treatment and hospitals unable to provide oxygen supplies turning away patients. Consequently, the government has decided to divert surplus oxygen stocks from industries.

### Ramco Cements unit in Alathiyur bags award

The Ramco Cements Ltd., Alathiyur, has received the 'Gold Category' award in the Apex India Occupational Health and Safety Awards-2020. More than 150 companies participated from various sectors such as cement, power, steel and automobile. Ramco Cements had participated in the 'cement category', according to a company release.

### LIC earns ₹1.84 lakh cr in new premium in FY21

LIC continued its impressive new business performance despite a highly challenging business environment amid the Covid-19 pandemic. It earned a new business or first year premium of about `1.84 lakh crore last fiscal up from about `1.77 lakh crore earned the previous year. The insurer also paid `1.34 lakh crore as claims.

### Indian Bank inks pact with angel investor

Indian Bank has signed an agreement with angel investment group The Chennai Angels for financing start-ups under its loan programme, 'IND Spring Board'. Under this, the bank extend credit facilities up to `50 crore for working capital needs and also fund term-loan requirement to buy fixed assets.

### Suresh Krishn takes over as president, CREDAI TN

Suresh Krishn, the Managing Director of Isha Homes, became the sixth president of the Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI), Tamil Nadu. The real estate body in the state represents Chennai, Erode, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tiruchirappalli with an active membership strength of over 294 associates. On taking over the new role, Krishn said that the demand for housing is here to stay.



IMPORT CONCENTRATORS

# Start-ups, VCs chip in to curb oxygen crisis

BISMAH MALIK @ Bengaluru

INDIA's tech start-ups and investment companies are pooling in resources to import oxygen concentrators from countries like China, Germany and UAE as the country's health facilities grapple with shortage of oxygen amidst increasing numbers of Covid-19 cases.

Rahul Aggarwal and Varun Aggarwal, founders of Designhill along with other start-up founders including Founder, Crush Fitness India; Shikher Gupta, Founder, Cuttlefish; and Satvacart Founder Rahul Hari Saxena through their not-for-profit organisation, Democracy Foundation, have started a fundraiser on ketto.org to import oxygen concentrators from China and the supply is likely to arrive in India from Monday onwards. So far, the foundation has been able to raise over ₹3 crore in just 12 hours to procure 500 concentrators, said Saxena. However, the requirement is higher in states like Delhi, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Logistics start-up Delhivery CEO Vikass Kapoor said in a Linkedin post that the company will be flying charters into India with oxygen concentrators and other essential supplies and can build more capacity on demand.

Similarly, global investment firm Sequoia Capital said that it is constantly coordinating with its China arm to be able to fly concentrators into India and is also pursuing leads to import the supplies from the other countries.

Rikant Pitti of travel tech firm Ease My Trip told this publication that they are exploring logistics avenues to import nearly 150 concentrators by next week from China and the same will be supplied for free to the needy persons/ hospitals. "We were also in touch with several suppliers from Dubai, UAE but due to the suspension of flights, the procurement has been halted," Pitti added.

### Fill in the supply gap

ACT Grants, a foundation by India's start-up community, said that it is planning to raise `75 crore for home health management, oxygen solutions and supplement medical workforce.

## Tendulkar recovers from Covid, to donate plasma

Former India captain Sachin Tendulkar on Saturday said he has recovered from Covid-19 and will donate plasma when he is eligible. Tendulkar, celebrating his 48th birthday on Saturday, tested positive for the virus on March 27 and had to be briefly hospitalised in Mumbai as a precautionary measure.

# Amidst fear, Anas gears up for World Relays

Part of India's 4x400m team to Poland, quarter-miler cautious about travel and safety due to Covid ahead of Olympics

**MARTIN JOSEPH** @Kochi

MUHAMMED Anas Yahiya has the same fear the rest of India has with respect to Covid-19.

"Till now, I'm safe and haven't been affected by the virus. But when you look around, the situation is so concerning and scary. Living in such uncertainty is challenging but we have to do what we can to deal with the situation," said Anas who has been based at the SAI centre in Patiala since the nationwide lockdown last year.

The 400m national-record holder recently got his visa to travel to Poland to compete in the World Relays in Silesia. He is part of the Indian contingent that is expected to take part in the competition. They are among the few athletes who will get to experience international competitions after almost a year. But with India reporting record number of fresh Covid-19 cases everyday, and many countries imposing travel bans on travellers from India, there are some fears.

**US, JAMAICA TEAMS WITHDRAW**

US and Jamaica have decided against sending squads for the World Relays. A report said that 'US and Jamaica have placed first and second at the World Athletics Relays in each of the four editions of the young event, but neither country will be sending a team to the 2021 meet'. Jamaica had named a full squad but withdrew the team citing travel restrictions.

Even the Indian Olympic Association president Narinder Batra had recently cautioned the National Sports Federations to be cautious when it comes to foreign competitions and exposure tours for the athletes.

"We were supposed to have an exposure tour in Turkey but now we hear that there is a lockdown there. As far as the World Relays are concerned, it is an important competition that will give us a lot of experience ahead of the Olympics. So far, there's been no travel advisory provided to us and we are waiting for instructions and guidance from the Federation and the officials. We hope they will make the necessary arrangements. Yes, there is the fear surrounding Covid, but if done right, we can participate in it safely. It's a difficult situation but we have to hope for the best," he said.

The Olympic bound athletes from India are expected to be among the first to start getting Covid vaccines when it is expected to be made accessible to everyone above the age of 18 beginning next month. "So far, thanks to regular testing and taking all necessary precautions, I've managed to train and look after myself. I'm injury free and in good physical condition and the idea now is to focus only on things that I can control. Rest, we'll have to see how things go," said Anas.

# Swimmers from Mumbai club train in Chennai as Khade looks on

**SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN** @Chennai

IT'S early morning in Chennai's SDAT swimming pool at Velachery, a well-developed residential area in the city. In the 50m Olympic-sized pool, one of the few Olympic-sized ones in the city, members of Khar Gymkhana, a big club in Mumbai, are training. In Maharashtra, there's stringent lockdown will all pools shut due to the rising cases. However, in Tamil Nadu, it's open for competitive swimmers. Observing the training session is the familiar face of Virdhawal Khade.

Even as it led to some rumours that Khade was now actively coaching, he himself denied it. "No, no, I am not in Chennai in any official capacity, I am just here because my wife (she is also a member of Khar Gymkhana) is here," he tells this daily. It's been four-five days since the group came down to Chennai and all permissions have been sought by the state government to continue their training. "We charge them a small amount plus GST for using our services," an SDAT official says. "They have been either coming here or go to a pool in Chepauk. Whenever they want to use the 50m facility, they come to Velachery."

Even as India's other elite Indian swimmers have gotten back to the pool to have a crack at making the 'A' time for the Tokyo Olympics, the 29-year-old has no such qualms. He hasn't trained in the pool since last July and is relieved that he hasn't gone back to the water since then. "To be honest, it's fine that I haven't trained full tilt in the water since July. I do my other normal on land exercises. But with this new lockdown, it would have been really frustrating to stop again had I been training on water."

The Maharashtrian, who will go back to Mumbai in a few days, also plays an active role in the state's Covid-19 response, as he works in the welfare and special assistance department, under the Collector's office. Interestingly, he says it's been easier to work the last few months than in the first wave.

**EXPRESS READ**

### India cricketer Veda loses mother to Covid

BENGALURU: Indian women cricketer Veda Krishnamurthy's mother Cheluvamba Devi succumbed to Covid-19 on Saturday in Chikkamagaluru. She was 67. In a tweet, Veda said her sister has also tested positive. "I have tested negative & appreciate if you can respect our privacy," she tweeted. The Karnataka State Cricket Association condoled the death.

### Hockey umpire dies due to Covid-related issues

NEW DELHI: Former international umpire Suresh Kumar Thakur has died due to Covid-19-related complications, Hockey India said. He was 51 and passed away on Friday in Mohali. Thakur had officiated in several international tournaments including the Four Nation Tournament in Hamburg (Germany) and the Azlan Shah Hockey Tournament at Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

### Japanese GP to remain at Suzuka through 2024

SUZUKA: The Japanese Grand Prix will remain at Suzuka Circuit until at least 2024, Formula 1 announced on Saturday. The track has been a regular fixture on the F1 calendar since 1987 and the multi-year extension is part of an effort to grow the sport in Asia. This season, 20-year-old Yuki Tsunoda became the first Japanese driver on the F1 grid since 2014. He races for AlphaTauri.

**EYE ON TOKYO**

# Two-month Russia trip in wrestler Bajrang's mind

**FIROZ MIRZA** @Chennai

EVEN as wrestlers Vinesh Phogat (53kg), Ravi Dahiya (57kg) and Deepak Punia (86kg) leave for Bulgaria on Sunday, their compatriot Bajrang Punia is planning to train in Russia for the next two months. He along with his Georgian coach Shako Bentinidis is awaiting an approval from the government in this regard.

"We haven't got the nod yet but expect visas by next week. If we get the clearance, we will soon head for Russia for two months," the coach told this daily from Sports Authority of India's National Centre of Excellence in Sonepat.

The world number one wrestler in 65kg conceded the final to Japanese Takuto Otoguro to finish second in the recently-concluded Asian Championships held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Injury recurred in his right elbow forcing him to withdraw from the gold medal bout. "He is doing fine. The injury is not serious but we don't want to aggravate it so we decided to concede the final," added the coach.

Speaking on plans ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, Shako said, "We may participate in the Poland Ranking Series scheduled in June. But we will decide Bajrang's participation keeping his opponents in mind," he said. "He is currently seeded second in the Olympic rankings." The team management will not take undue risk because of the pandemic.

Gadzhimurad Rashidov of Russia is seeded first with 60 points with the 27-year-old Bajrang closely following him with 59 points. Kazakhstan's grappler Daulet Niyazbekov is third with 56 points. Bajrang's nemesis Otoguro is fifth with 40 points.

**Bulgaria trip**

The WFI along with the SAI have arranged a Bulgaria trip for all six wrestlers who have qualified for the Olympics. However, Bajrang, Anshu Malik (57kg) and Sonam Malik (62kg) backed out citing different reasons. "Anshu has rashes while Sonam is recovering from an injury she suffered during the Asian Olympic Qualifier. Bajrang is also not going which means only Vinesh, Ravi and Deepak will train in Bulgaria for the time being. The camp will conclude on May 9 after which they will head back home," said Vinod Tomar, WFI's assistant secretary.

However, when questioned on Bajrang's plan, he expressed unawareness over the issue. "Given the situation, we are not encouraging wrestlers for individual training. Also, we will decide on the resumption of national camps after assessing the situation," he added.

Notably, the camps for men and women wrestlers in Sonepat and Lucknow respectively were suspended after a few wrestlers and coaches tested Covid positive in Lucknow. There have been a lot of flight restrictions imposed in a lot of countries and under the circumstances it needs to be seen how many exposure trips materialises.

# 2022 WC in NZ will be my swansong: Raj

**AGENCIES** @New Delhi

INDIAN women's ODI captain Mithali Raj on Saturday indicated that the 2022 50-over World Cup in New Zealand will be her "swansong" after 23 illustrious years in international cricket.

The 38-year-old Mithali, arguably, the finest woman cricketer that India has ever produced, also said that she is seriously looking for some good seam bowling options for the lively New Zealand tracks that will be on offer next year. "It's been 21 years of international cricket and I know 2022 is my swansong, The World Cup," Mithali said during the virtual launch of the book '1971: The Beginning of India's Cricketing Greatness', published by Harper Collins.

"The last year is equal to the 20 years of my international cricket," she added.

Mithali, the only women batter with 7000 plus ODI runs, also spoke about how she had to keep herself motivated during the Covid-19 times. "I know we are in difficult times but it takes a lot out of me to keep working on my fitness. I am not getting any younger, in fact I am getting older and I know the importance of fitness," Mithali said.

# Women archers assured of medal, men's team out

**PTI** @Guatemala City

RECURVE women's team of Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat and Komalika Bari assured India of its first medal in the Archery World Cup Stage 1 after cruising into the final with a straight-set win over Spain here. However, the men's team, which qualified as third seed, lost in the quarterfinals to its Spanish rivals 26-27 in a shoot-off after both teams were tied 4-4.

India are also in the medal hunt in three more events with newly-wed Atanu Das and Deepika advancing into the mixed pair bronze play-off. The duo will also vie for individual medals, having made the last-four in their respective sections.

In the women's semifinal, Spanish trio of Elia Canales, Ines De Velasco and Leyre Fernandez Infante were no match to the top seeded Indians, who drilled in consistent scores of 55, 56 and 55 to seal a 6-0 win and make their first World Cup final since Shanghai, 2016.

# *Wounded Spurs look to end City streak*

Treble-chasing Manchester City face a Tottenham side desperate to end their trophy drought in the League Cup final at Wembley on Sunday. Here's look at how the teams are shaped ahead of final...

**FIRST MAJOR**

Just seven days after the bombshell revelation that Man City and Tottenham were among 12 clubs plotting the breakaway Super League, they will contest the first major silverware of the English season. It would be no surprise if there are protesters and dissenting voices among the 8,000 fans allowed into the stadium.

**KANE-LESS SPURS FACE STERN TEST**

City, who are in prime position to reclaim the Premier League crown, are looking to win the Cup for the fourth successive time. With Kevin De Bruyne, injured in last weekend's quadruple-ending FA Cup semifinal defeat against Chelsea, and striker Sergio Aguero returning to training, Tottenham, under caretaker manager Ryan Mason, will have to produce something special to end City's streak. Spurs arrive at Wembley wounded by a week that saw Jose Mourinho sacked on Monday, just days after Harry Kane suffered the latest in a long line of ankle injures. Kane missed Tottenham's 2-1 win over Southampton in the first match of the post-Mourinho era on Wednesday and is not certain to return.

**We deserve to be there. The final every team wants to win and we will travel to London to do a good game and win the title. The Aston Villa (EPL) game showed we were ready and we'll be ready on Sunday.**

Pep Guardiola, Man City

**2008** Spurs have won the EFL Cup four times. The last time they won was in 2007-08, also their last Major title.

LIVE ON JIO TV/VOOT SELECT @ 9 PM

# Willock's strike helps Newcastle draw Liverpool

**AFP** @Liverpool

JURGEN Klopp admitted Liverpool are not playing like a side who "deserve" Champions League football next season after blowing the chance to move into the Premier League's top four with a 1-1 draw against Newcastle on Saturday.

Mohamed Salah had opened the scoring after just three minutes, but Liverpool wasted a host of chances to extend their lead and paid in stoppage time. The Reds even had a reprieve when Callum Wilson's equaliser was ruled out after a VAR review for handball, but still could not hold on as Willock's deflected strike secured a vital point in the Magpies' bid for top flight survival. Liverpool move up to sixth but are a point behind fourth-placed Chelsea and West Ham.

Two more dropped points is a blow to Liverpool's chances of a place in next season's Champions League.

**Watford promoted**

Watford bounced back to the Premier League at the first time of asking after a 1-0 win over Millwall sealed promotion. The Hornets will join Norwich in the top flight next season after the Canaries also got promoted last weekend.

### Barty beats Pliskova to reach Stuttgart semis

STUTTGART: Top-ranked Ash Barty moved a step closer to her first clay title since the 2019 French Open after she came back from a break down in the deciding set to beat Karolina Pliskova 2-6, 6-1, 7-5 in the Porsche Grand Prix quarterfinals. Pliskova served for the match at 5-4 in the decider but Barty earned five break points and converted the last. The Australian then held to love and broke Pliskova again to win when the Czech sent a forehand long.

**RAJASTHAN RAJYA VIDYUT PRASARAN NIGAM LIMITED**

**NOTICE INVITING BID**

Bids for "Modification work of 132kV S/c line between 220kV GSS Ajmer and 132kV GSS Subhash Nagar from Loc. No. 17B to 20A between IR kM 0/4-5 to 3/6-7 with 500 Sq. MM 132kV XLPE cabel (Deposit work of M/s NWR, Ajmer and M/s RE, Jaipur)", against specification no. RVPN/EHV/A&SP/TN-62 are invited from interested bidders up to 02.00PM, 29.05.2021. For other particulars of the bid may be visited on the procurement portal (http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in, http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in of the state and http://energy.rajasthan.gov.in/rvpnl departmental website. UBN:VPN2122WLOB00048

RRVPN/TR-5131/2021 Superintending Engineer

Raj.Samwad/C/21/790 (Automation, N/M & SP), Jaipur

**BHAKRA BEAS MANAGEMENT BOARD**
**(POWER WING)**

Corrigendum-3 NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER

NIT No.: 484/PHD/Bh-I/476 Dated : 29.12.2020

**Name of Office**: Chief Engineer/System Operation, Planning & Design (Power Plant) Dte., BBMB (PW), Flat No. 75, SLDC Complex, Industrial Area, Phase-1, Chandigarh.

**Name of Work**: Design, Manufacture, Supply, Erection, Testing and Commissioning of new Microprocessor based digital type electro hydraulic Governors alongwith integration with existing SCADA of 5 No, machines of Bhakra Left Bank Power House.

| | |
|---|---|
| Tender documents Download Start Date & Time | 30.12.2020 from 1100 hrs. |
| Last date & time of uploading complete prequalifying document | 30.04.2021 upto 1700 hrs. |
| Tender document download end Date & Time | 17.05.2021 upto 1700 hrs. |
| Last date & time of online bid submission | 15.06.2021 upto 1100 hrs. |
| Date & time of online bid Opening (Part-I) | 15.06.2021 from 1500 hrs onwards |

The Bids are to be submitted online, for cost of specification, Earnest Money Deposit and detailed NIT, please visit BBMB website : www.bbmb.gov.in & https://bbmbeproc.abcprocure.com

410-PR-SO-5 FOR YOUR BETTER TOMORROW SAVE ENERGY TODAY

E-mail: eerwssnpd@rediffmail.com

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, R.W.S.&S. DIVISION, NUAPADA**

Govt. of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice

Bid Identification No. RWS&S_02/2021-22

**O-88:** The Executive Engineer, R.W.S & S Division, Nuapada on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites bids through e-procurement in double cover system in conformity with the terms & conditions of the detailed tender call notice (DTCN) from the Contractor registered with the Odisha State Govt. & Contractors of equivalent grade/ class registered with Central Govt. / any other State Govt. / MES / Railway & Reputed Engineering firms having valid & up to date Contractors registration certificate, GST clearance Certificate & PAN Card and possessing compatible Digital Signature Certificate as given in the DTCN to be eventually drawn up in the standard Lump sum **(G2 )** contract form.

| | |
|---|---|
| Nature of Work: - | Rural Piped Water Supply schemes in different villages under Nuapada district. |
| No. of Tender: - | 10 (Ten) nos. |
| Approx. Estimated Cost: - | Rs.104.90 Lakhs to Rs.203.55 Lakhs |
| Period of completion: - | 08 (Eight) months |
| Tender Cost: - | Rs.10000/- |
| Class of Contractor: - | B & A |

Date and Time of availability of bid document in the portal: - 26.04.2021 at 10.00 A.M.
Last date /Time for receipt of bids in the portal: - 05.05.2021 up to 5.00 P.M.
Date of Opening of bid: - 07.05.2021 at 11.00 A.M.

The bidders have to participate in online bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website **http://tendersorissa.gov.in**

Sd/- Executive Engineer,
RWSS Division, Nuapada

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**SAFETY IN MIND**

# *Doctors should decide Olympics fate, says ice hockey great*

**AFP** @Montreal

HAYLEY Wickenheiser, a Canadian member of the International Olympic Committee Athletes' Commission, says medical experts should decide whether or not to stage the Tokyo Olympics, not athletes or the IOC.

Wickenheiser, a six-time Olympian who won four ice hockey gold medals and also played softball at the 2000 Summer Games, told *CBC Sports* that safety and public health need to be the decisive factors about conducting the Games at Japan in July and August. "This decision needs to be made by medical and health experts, not by corporate and big business," Wickenheiser said in a posting on the *CBC* website.

"A very clear and transparent explanation needs to be given if the Games are going to go ahead."

Wickenheiser, who is set to graduate from medical school next week, knows the money, preparation and training that has gone into the planned staging of the Games in Tokyo, which is now under "emergency orders" due to the Covid-19 pandemic that forced the postponement of the Olympics from last year. Wickenheiser, a Hockey Hall of Fame inductee, knows after training for years to compete, she would do anything to go, so athletes, and the IOC, shouldn't make the final choice on the Games' fate. "You almost need someone else outside with less invested than you to say it is or isn't worth it," she said.

"It shouldn't be the IOC making that call. That should be the experienced doctors and physicians who have dealt with pandemics and people with no skin the game and nothing to gain or lose from this." Wickenheiser wants public safety, not television deals and sponsor bonuses, to be the critical factor. "This is what it's all about. Money and broadcast rights and promises made," she said. "I question if the health and the well-being of the athletes attending has been at the true forefront. I have to ask that question because it wasn't when the Games were first postponed."

Wickenheiser went on social media in March 2020 and said it would be irresponsible and insensitive for the Tokyo Olympics to be staged as planned. Five days later, Canada's Olympic Committee said it wouldn't send athletes to Tokyo that summer and two days later, the Olympics were postponed.

Although mother-to-newborn transmission of coronavirus is rare, newborns of expectant mothers with COVID-19 can still suffer indirect adverse health risks as a result of worsening maternal illness due to the disease, says a study conducted on 255 neonates delivered between March 1 and July 31 last year in Massachusetts, US.

# TOO MANY DOSES IN HAND, U.S. FACES CALLS TO SHARE

## Nations watch incredulously as US states turn down shipments from federal government because vaccine supplies are excessive

A vaccine clinic at a sporting goods store in Pittsburgh | AP

MEDICINE

IN the United States, more than one-fourth of the population — nearly 90 million people — has been fully vaccinated and supplies are so robust that some states are turning down planned shipments from the federal government.

This stark access gap is prompting increased calls across the world for the U.S. to start shipping vaccine supplies to poorer countries. That's creating an early test for President Joe Biden, who has pledged to restore American leadership on the world stage and prove to wary nations that the U.S. is a reliable partner after years of retrenchment during the Trump administration.

J. Stephen Morrison, senior vice president and director of the Global Health Policy Center at the Center for Strategic & International Studies in Washington, said that as the US moves from vaccine scarcity to abundance, it has an opportunity to "shape the outcomes dramatically in this next phase because of the assets we have." Biden, who took office in January as the virus was raging in the US, has responded cautiously to calls for help from abroad.

He has focused the bulk of his administration's vaccinations efforts at home. He kept in place an agreement struck by the Trump administration requiring drugmakers that got U.S. aid in developing or expanding vaccine manufacturing to sell their first doses produced in the country to the U.S. government. The U.S. has also used the Defense Production Act to secure vital supplies for the production of vaccine, a move that has blocked the export of some supplies outside the country.

White House aides have argued that Biden's cautious approach to promises around vaccine supply and delivery was validated in the wake of manufacturing issues with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and the subsequent safety "pause" to investigate a handful of reported blood clots. In addition, officials say they need to maintain reserves in the US to vaccinate teenagers and younger children once safety studies for those age groups are completed and if booster shots should be required later.

The White House is aware that the rest of the world is watching. Last month, the U.S. shared 4 million vaccine doses with Canada and Mexico, and this past week, Biden said those countries would be targets for additional supplies. He also said countries in Central America could receive US vaccination help, though officials have not detailed any specific plans.

The US has also faced criticism that it is not only hoarding its own stockpiles, but also blocking other countries from accessing vaccines, including through its use of the law that gives Washington broad authority to direct private companies to meet the needs of the national defense.

Adar Poonawalla, chief executive of the Serum Institute of India, the world's largest maker of vaccines, asked Biden on Twitter on April 16 to lift the US embargo on exporting raw materials needed to make the jabs. India is seeing the world's fastest growth in infections.

The US Department of Health and Human Services' 2020 annual report also raised eyebrows for a section titled "Combatting malign influences in the Americas," which said the US had convinced Brazil to not buy the Russian shot.

EXFILE • RESEARCH

# *Homo sapiens' secret edge against Neanderthals? Genes linked to creativity*

**Researchers have discovered a series of creativity-linked genes that may have given humans (Homo sapiens) a significant edge over Neanderthals, enabling them to avoid extinction**

**A WEAPON**

The findings suggest that these genes played "a fundamental role in the evolution of creativity, self-awareness and cooperative behaviour," the multinational research team wrote this week in the *Nature* journal *Molecular Psychiatry*. Such genes were like "a secret weapon" that gave modern humans "a significant advantage over now-extinct hominids by fostering greater resilience to ageing, injury, and disease, they wrote

**972**

Previously, the same team had identified a pool of 972 genes organised into three brain networks, the oldest — which relates to learning habits, social attachment and conflict resolution — dating back 40 million years

The second network — which relates to intentional self-control — emerged 2 million years ago, while the newest, governing creative self-awareness, only emerged 100,000 years ago

**DEFINING CREATIVITY**

"Thanks to these genes, Homo sapiens enjoyed greater physical fitness than now-extinct hominids, providing them with a superior level of resilience to ageing, injury, and disease," they wrote. "Physical fitness, or resilience, is intrinsic to the definition of creativity," said the study's lead author Igor Zwir

**WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT**

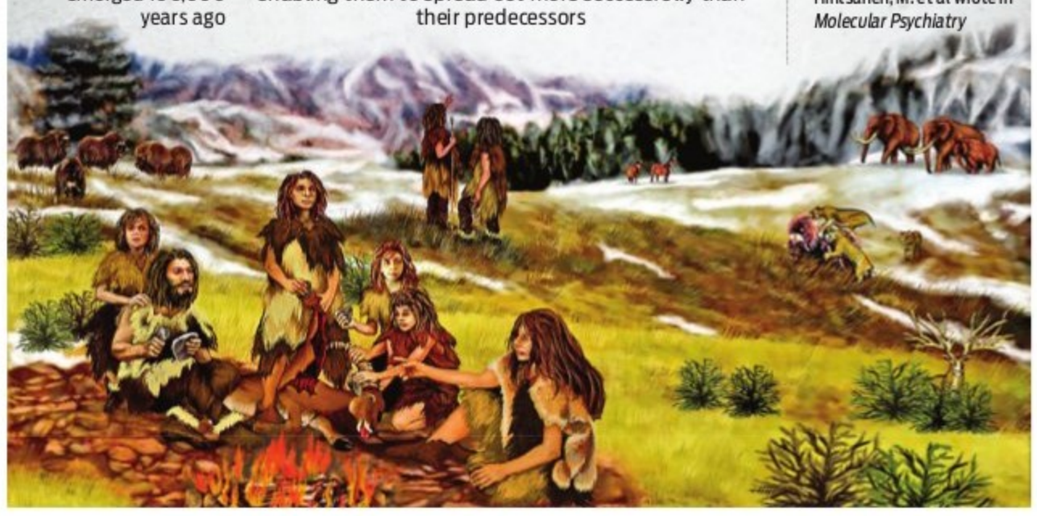
The finding offers fresh insight into the mystery of why Homo sapiens outlived the Neanderthals and other species. The authors said creativity may have encouraged cooperation between individuals which would have set the stage for technological innovation, behavioural flexibility and openness to exploration, enabling them to spread out more successfully than their predecessors

**267**

Led by Granada University in Spain, the experts identified 267 genes unique to humans, and — through genetic markers, genetic expression data and AI-related MRI tech — found they were related to creativity

**The scientists were able to identify the regions of the brain in which those genes (and those with which they interacted) were overexpressed. These regions are involved in human self-awareness and creativity, and include the regions that are strongly associated with human well-being and that appeared relatively recently**

Zwir, I., Del-Val, C., Hintsanen, M. et al wrote in *Molecular Psychiatry*



# Kenyans fear for their lives as HIV drugs run short

MEDICINE

KENYANS living with HIV say their lives are in danger due to a shortage of anti-retroviral drugs donated by the United States amid a dispute between the U.S. aid agency and the Kenyan government.

The delayed release of the drugs shipped to Kenya late last year is due to the government slapping a $847,902 tax on the donation, and the U.S. aid agency having "trust" issues with the graft-tainted Kenya Medical Supplies Authority, activists and officials said.

Activists on Friday dismissed as "public relations" the government's statement on Thursday that it had resolved the issue and distributed the drugs to 31 of Kenya's 47, counties. The government said all counties within five days will have the drugs needed for 1.4 million people. The US is by far the largest donor for Kenya's HIV response.

Bernard Baridi, chief executive officer of Blast, a network of young people living with the disease, said the drugs would last for just a month.

He said the delay in distributing the drugs, in addition to supply constraints caused by the coronavirus pandemic, meant that many people living with HIV were getting a week's supply instead of three months.

According to Baridi, children living with HIV are suffering the most due to the shortage of a drug known Kaletra, which comes in a syrup form that can be taken more easily. Parents are forced to look for the drug in tablet form, crush it and mix it with water, and it's still bitter for children to ingest.

# Biggest space station crowd in decade

SPACE

THE International Space Station's population swelled to 11 on Saturday with the jubilant arrival of SpaceX's third crew capsule in less than a year. It's the biggest crowd up there in more than a decade.

All of the astronauts — representing the US, Russia, Japan and France — managed to squeeze into camera view for a congratulatory call from the leaders of their space agencies. "In this tough situation around the world, I believe you have brought courage and hope for all of us," Japanese Space Agency President Hiroshi Yamakawa said from his country's flight control center, referring to the global pandemic.

A recycled SpaceX capsule carrying four astronauts arrived at the space station a day after launching from NASA's Kennedy Space Center. The Dragon capsule docked autonomously with the orbiting outpost more than 260 miles (420 kilometers) above the Indian Ocean. The hatches swung open a couple hours later, uniting all 11 space travelers.

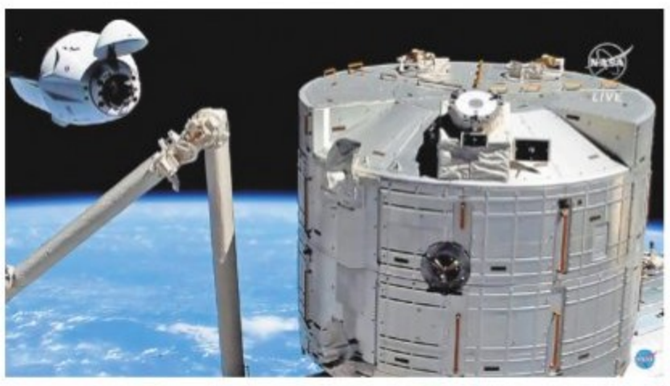
"Man, it is awesome to see the 11 of you on station," said NASA's acting administrator, Steve Jurczyk. He noted that this will be the norm, now that SpaceX is regularly flying crews.

The newcomers will spend six months at the space station. They'll replace four astronauts who will return to Earth in their own Dragon capsule Wednesday to end a half-year mission. NASA deliberately planned for a brief overlap so the outgoing SpaceX crew could show the new arrivals around. Although this was SpaceX's third crew flight for NASA, it was the first to use a vehicle that's flown before, an essential part of Musk's push to the moon and Mars. The Dragon capsule was used for SpaceX's first crew launch last May, while the Falcon rocket soaring Friday hoisted crew two in November.

It was the first time two SpaceX crew Dragons were parked there at the same time — practically side by side.

NASA astronauts Shane Kimbrough and Megan McArthur — the commander and pilot of the returning Dragon — monitored their capsule's flat screen computers during the morning rendezvous. They could have taken control if necessary, but the autonomous system did its job, much like a self-driving car.

Also checking into the space station: France's Thomas Pesquet and Japan's Akihiko Hoshide. Both have lived there before, as has Kimbrough. But it was the first station visit for McArthur. She flew up in the same seat and the same capsule — named Endeavour — as her husband, Bob Behnken, did on SpaceX's debut crew mission.



(Top) The SpaceX Crew Dragon craft approaches the International Space Station on Saturday. (Bottom) After it docked, all astronauts on board pose for a photo | NASA

FACT OF THE MATTER

## Fiery name for Mars rover

SPACE

China's first Mars rover will be named Zhurong after a traditional fire god, the government said on Saturday. The rover is aboard the Tianwen-1 probe that arrived in Mars orbit on Feb 24 and is due to land in May to look for evidence of life. It is part of Chinese space plans that include launching a crewed orbital station and landing a human on the moon. China in 2019 became the first country to land a space probe on the little-explored far side of the moon and in December returned lunar rocks to Earth for the first time since the 1970s. The rover's title fits with the Chinese name for Mars — "Huo Xing," or fire star, authorities said.

## Crops can steal genes: Study

RESEARCH

Grass crops are able to bend the rules of evolution by borrowing genes from their neighbours, giving them a competitive advantage, as per a new study. The research, led by UK-based University of Sheffield, is the first to show that grasses can incorporate DNA from other species into their genomes through a process known as lateral gene transfer. "The stolen genetic secrets give them an evolutionary advantage by allowing them to grow faster, bigger or stronger and adapt to new environments quicker," the university said in a statement. The research team studied grasses, which include some economically crucial plants.

# US to resume J&J vaccine

MEDICINE

US health officials lifted an 11-day pause on Covid-19 vaccinations using Johnson & Johnson's single-dose shot on Friday, after scientific advisers decided its benefits outweigh a rare risk of blood clot. The government uncovered 15 vaccine recipients who developed a highly unusual kind of blood clot out of nearly 8 million people given the J&J shot. All were women, most under age 50. Three died, and seven remain hospitalized.

But ultimately, federal health officials decided that J&J's one-and-done vaccine is critical to fight the pandemic — and that the small clot risk could be handled with warnings to help younger women decide if they should use that shot or an alternative. The CDC said the J&J vaccine has important advantages for some people who were anxiously awaiting its return. And the FDA updated online vaccine information leaflets for would-be recipients and health workers, so that shots could resume as early as Saturday.

LIVING UNDERGROUND

# *Isolation study participants emerge after 40 days in the dark*

Members of the French team that participated in the "Deep Time" scientific study emerge from the Lombrives Cave, France, on Saturday | AP

SCIENCE

LOMBRIVES CAVE: Ever wonder what it would feel like to unplug from a hyperconnected world and hide away in a cave for a few weeks? Fifteen people in France found out.

After 40 days in voluntary isolation in a dark, damp and vast cave, eight men and seven women who took part in a scientific experiment emerged Saturday from their self-segregation in the Pyrenees.

With big smiles on their pale faces, the 15 participants exited the Lombrives cave to a round of applause and basked in the light of day while wearing special glasses to protect their eyes after so long in the dark.

"It's really warm!" said one.

For 40 days and 40 nights, the group lived in and explored the cave without a sense of time. There were no clocks and no sunlight inside, where the temperature was 10 degrees Celsius (50 F) and the relative humidity stood at 100%. The cave dwellers had no contact with the outside world, no updates on the pandemic or any communication with friends and family above ground.

Scientists at the Human Adaption Institute leading the 1.2 million-euro $1.5 million) "Deep Time" project say the experiment will help them better understand how people adapt to drastic changes in living conditions and environments, something much of the world can relate to because of coronavirus pandemic.

In partnership with labs in France and Switzerland, scientists monitored the 15-member group's sleep patterns, social interactions and behavioral reactions via sensors. One of the sensors was a tiny thermometer inside a capsule that participants swallowed like a pill. The capsules measure body temperature and transmit data to a portable computer until they are expelled naturally.

The team members followed their biological clocks to know when to wake up, go to sleep and eat. They counted their days not in hours but in sleep cycles.

On Friday, scientists monitoring the participants entered the cave to let the research subjects know they would be coming out soon. They said many of the people in the group miscalculated how long they had been in the cave and thought they had another week to 10 days to go.

"It's really interesting to observe how this group synchronizes themselves," project director Christian Clot said in a recording done from inside the cave. Working together on projects and organizing tasks without being able to set a time to meet was especially challenging, he said.

Although the participants looked visibly tired, two-thirds of them expressed a desire to remain underground a bit longer in order to finish group projects started during the expedition, Benoit Mauvieux, a chronobiologist involved in the research, told The AP.

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